

A STUDY OF WOMEN IN EIGHT ENGLISH DOMESTIC TRAGEDIES 1590-1642

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of Master of
Philosophy

Shakespeare Institute
College of Arts & Law
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August 2014

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Abstract

This thesis uses the social history of Early Modern England to provide the context for a discussion of tragedy in domestic drama; eight plays from *circa* 1590 to 1642. The focus of the discussion is on one female character in each play and how they contribute to their own tragedy.

Alice Arden (*Arden of Faversham*) and Anne Frankford (*A Woman Killed with Kindness*) both commit adultery; Alice also plots her husband's murder. Rachel Merry's (*Two Lamentable Tragedies*) love of and loyalty to her brother leads her to conceal the murders committed by him.

Anne Drury (*A Warning for Fair Women*), in addition to her skills as a cunning woman, uses every piece of information that comes her way to her advantage. Elizabeth Sawyer (*The Witch of Edmonton*) is an intelligent and articulate woman. The treatment she receives at the hands of the villagers of Edmonton leads her to take on the role that they assign her, that of witch.

Clandestine marriage, plight troth and wardship bring tragedy to three women, the Wife, (*A Yorkshire Tragedy*), Clare Harcop (*The Miseries of Enforced Marriage*) and Anne Boote (*The Vow-Breaker*).

The genre of domestic tragedy often included a strong woman as one of the main characters. This is true of all of these women, despite their being a guilty party to their own tragedy.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Martin Wiggins for his unfailing encouragement and advice throughout my time of research and writing. The Fellows and staff of the Shakespeare Institute, Juliet Creese and Rebecca White and Karin Brown and Kate Welch from the Library have been unfailingly helpful.

For access to their library, I would like to thank the President and Fellows of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland and the Archivist, Harriet Wheelock. My colleague Dr. Jacinta O'Halloran has provided helpful comments and my sisters have listened to my constant talking about domestic tragedy and a woman's lot in early Modern England. Whilst working on my thesis, I count myself fortunate to have had the support of the Renaissance Drama Research Group at the Shakespeare Institute.

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Introduction

This thesis combines drama and the social history of Early Modern England to discuss tragedy in the genre of domestic drama, specifically eight plays from *Arden of Faversham* to *The Vow-Breaker*. The focus of the discussion will be on one female character in each play. Although some of the plays have more than one plot, only the plot relating to the woman to be discussed will be considered. Unlike Shakespeare's plays, the setting of domestic dramas is neither the 'vast fields of France' nor the courts of princes. Instead, the action takes place in villages or the more intimate setting of home and parlour and its characters are the wives of country gentlemen, city wives or elderly women accused of witchcraft. It is an intimate world, where the closest of relationships between brother and sister, husband and wife, and lovers is explored. At the heart of the plays and what drives the plots are the very human emotions of love, passion, greed and lust.

The authorship of the eight plays ranges from unknown author to recently attributed author and a trio of authors. Sources vary from contemporary records to popular pamphlets and interviews with those awaiting execution. The likely date of first performance of *Arden of Faversham* is 1590 and it was published in 1592 without an author's name on the title page. This has led scholars over the centuries to suggest a number of possible authors including Thomas Kyd, William Shakespeare or Christopher Marlowe. Martin Wiggins, in his edition of domestic plays, has a number of suggestions as to the type of person who may have written the play without attributing it to a particular author.¹ He is of the opinion that its author was a man with more than a broad classical education and given his knowledge of the county, a native

¹ Martin Wiggins, ed. *A Woman Killed with Kindness and Other Domestic Plays*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pps. 284-87.

of Kent. The source of the play was Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*. Will Sharpe in *William Shakespeare & Others: Collaborative Plays* suggests there is strong evidence that a young Shakespeare was involved in the writing of Scene 8, although the author(s) of the play and the circumstances in which it was written are unknown.²

Two Lamentable Tragedies, the only known play attributed to Robert Yarrington tells two tales of tragedies one set in Italy and the other in the City of London in August 1594. The London story concerns Thomas Merry and his sister Rachel who were executed following the murder of Thomas Beech and his boy and their subsequent attempts to conceal the murders.

Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* from 1603 follows the marriage of John and Anne Frankford from the celebration of their marriage through her adultery to her deathbed. Heywood provides a picture of country society, the household, love of outdoor life and the entertainment they made for themselves away from the city.

The author of *A Warning for Fair Women* is now unknown, the play is likely to have been written in 1597 and performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men. It dramatises the events of 23rd March 1573 when George Sanders, a city merchant, was murdered by his wife's lover with her (tacit) agreement and a neighbour and her servant.

The Witch of Edmonton of 1621 was written by Thomas Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley with each of them taking on the responsibility for one of the plots. Dekker had the overall responsibility and wrote the Elizabeth Sawyer scenes, Ford was

² Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, eds. with Jan Sewell and Will Sharpe, *William Shakespeare & Others: Collaborative Plays* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pps.650-57.

responsible for the Frank Thorney plot, and Rowley for Cuddy Banks.³ Plays written by a number of authors were not unusual and there are a number of examples in Henslowe's diary.⁴

Two plays share the same source, *A Yorkshire Tragedy* which is now attributed to Thomas Middleton although its first publication attributed it to William Shakespeare, and *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* by George Wilkins. The source is a pamphlet entitled *Two most vnnaturall and bloodie Murthers* of 1605 and it recounts the murder of his two sons by Walter Calverley. Wardship and enforced marriage drive the action here and in *The Vow-Breaker* by William Sampson which is similar in plot.

The sphere of the domestic tragedy was the home and one of the main characters is usually a woman. This thesis will focus on one character from each play; eight women. The plays end tragically for each of these women, with her death in seven of the eight plays. Whilst each of these women is a victim of tragedy, they are all, to varying degrees, a guilty party in their own tragedy. These particular plays were chosen because they covered a time period when the genre was popular and include very different women with contrasting lives. Alice Arden (*Arden of Faversham*) is a strong focused woman living in the busy port of Faversham. Rachel Merry (*Two Lamentable Tragedies*) lives and works in a tavern in one of the less salubrious parts of London. Anne Frankford (*A Woman Killed with Kindness*) lives in a country manor in Yorkshire. Anne Drury (*A Warning for Fair Women*) also lives in London, but in the city with its business and merchant classes. Elizabeth Sawyer (*The Witch of Edmonton*) is an elderly woman living alone in the village of Edmonton. The Wife (*A Yorkshire Tragedy*), like Anne Frankford lives in a manor house, albeit impoverished, in Yorkshire. Clare Harcop (*The Miseries of Enforced Marriage*), a young woman, lives

³ Wiggins, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, p.6.

⁴ R. A. Foakes, (ed.) *Henslowe's Diary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

with her father and Anne Boote (*The Vow-Breaker*) lives in Clifton during the Civil War and, with her young husband away at war, contracts a marriage to a wealthy older man.

The women are discussed in the context of the social history of Early Modern England. This is not without its difficulties as there is the temptation to view them as 'real women' with a life outside the play and to extemporise as to how they might think or act in certain circumstances. Instead, the social history of Early Modern England is used to discuss the lives of women in general and it is this that is then applied to the women in the plays.

It would not be possible to discuss the plays without first considering a definition of domestic drama. The first major work to discuss and to attempt to define domestic drama was Henry Hitch Adams's *English Domestic or, Homiletic Tragedy 1575-1642*.⁵ As the title suggests, Adams takes a particular standpoint; the plays were written to teach a lesson, although this view has been argued against by subsequent writers on the genre. English domestic tragedy told tales of infidelity and murder – a wife and her lover sometimes plot to kill her husband. Wife and lover pay the ultimate price for their crime but, before their execution, they begin to think of repentance and plead for God's mercy; a typical play follows this pattern. To fully understand the plays, in Adams's view, it is necessary to understand the popular theology of Early Modern England especially the homilies (thirty three in total) which clergy were required to read every Sunday and Holy Days throughout the year. It was necessary for man to repent his sins; Adams refers to Williams in *Two Lamentable Tragedies* who is plagued by his conscience and reveals to the authorities what he knows of Merry's crimes. Adams believes that the authors of domestic dramas were consciously using the plays

⁵ Henry Hitch Adams, *English Domestic or, Homiletic Tragedy 1575-1642* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1943).

to teach a lesson and that the plays, entertainment value aside, were didactic, comparing them to the sermons preached in churches on Sunday.⁶

Andrew Clark's two volumes, *Domestic Drama: A Survey of the Origins, Antecedents, and Nature of the Domestic Play in England 1500-1640*, could be considered as the basis of subsequent scholarly work on domestic drama.⁷ His aim is to provide a full length critical summary of English drama during this period which, unlike Adams, Clark expands to include tragi comedy, comedy, farce and romance in addition to tragedy. Clark aims to provide a full length critical survey of the English domestic play from 1500-1640 by looking at its antecedents, an analysis of the plays and how they came to be regarded as domestic drama. He also provides dates and sources, authorship and information on lost plays, together with a complete bibliography of writings on domestic drama.⁸ Emphasis is placed on the family rather than viewing the plays as homiletic literature and Clark provides a review of the literature to date. In Clark's opinion the relationship between husband and wife should be at the heart of domestic plays given the importance of this relationship to the genre.⁹ It is this relationship that is often responsible for the plots, subplots and petty treasons of the plays.

Clark seeks to provide a 'working definition' of what domestic drama should include, it should be based on historical fact or a recent possibly sensational event.¹⁰ It should portray ordinary or everyday life with a humble hero and, focusing on marriage or the family, it should have a moral lesson and what he describes as a realistic presentation. Clark also considers in subsequent chapters the religious and moral

⁶ Adams, *English Domestic or Homiletic Tragedy*, pps. 6-7.

⁷ Andrew Clark, *Domestic Drama: A Survey of the Origins, Antecedents and Nature of the Domestic Play in England 1500-1640*, Vol 1 (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1975) p.iii.

⁸ Clark, *Domestic Drama*, p.iv.

⁹ Clark, *Domestic Drama*, p.10.

¹⁰ Clark, *Domestic Drama*, p.19.

background as the plays often feature the crime followed by detection and remorse either on the way to or on the gallows.¹¹ There are examples of this in the domestic plays which have survived including *A Warning for Fair Women*. He is of the view that the domestic plays which survive are a calculated mix of both the didactic and the sensationalist.¹² Clark provides a useful introduction to domestic plays in general, particularly as he considers the historical background of the themes on which the plays were based in the domestic manuals of the period.

Catherine Belsey's *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* has three aims; to add to the history of the human subject in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Secondly to consider woman in relation to man; placing her side by side with man and thirdly to bring together literature and history.¹³ Belsey uses not only the homilies of early Modern England but also plays, including some of those discussed in this thesis, conduct books and domestic manuals. Her interpretation of the period is that it included both enforced silence and intense and violent conflict. Her starting point is the plays of the period and she begins with the crime of Alice Arden, which even eighty years after the murder of her husband, was still being written about.

It could be possible to describe the marriage of Arden and his wife as including both enforced silence and intense and violent conflict. There are no intimate conversations between husband and wife, the focus is on the household and its running; the provision of meals in particular. Arden's thoughts on his marriage are spoken to Franklin, whilst Alice confides hers to Mosby as they engage in recruiting Arden's murderers. Belsey sees the early modern period as one excluding women, although women were trying to disrupt the tyranny and absolutism which contained them,

¹¹ Clark, *Domestic Drama*, p.27.

¹² Clark, *Domestic Drama* p.136.

¹³ Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Routledge, 1985) p.ix.

whether within their homes or society.¹⁴ In the domestic plays women break free and find what Belsey refers to as other forms of speech, often authorised, ending in murder and execution.

Belsey contributed a chapter, Alice Arden's Crime, *Arden of Faversham* (c.1590) to *Staging the Renaissance*, her focus is still on marriage but here she considers the institution of marriage, which she describes as being in crisis during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; Alice Arden's scandal was not the murder of her husband but her challenge to 'the institution of marriage'.¹⁵ Belsey goes on to consider marriage and divorce in these centuries and the efforts of the Anglican Church to control marriage.

In Frances Dolan's *Domestic Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550-1700*, the focus is on domestic conflict, specifically those crimes that although occurring less often attracted the most attention; murder (wife or child), witchcraft and husband killing.¹⁶ She describes herself as following in the footsteps of the new historicist and cultural materialist critics. Her argument is that in domestic tragedy the threat comes from within the family; the intimate rather than the invader, in that familiar place where a man should believe himself safe. Dolan considers women as the perpetrators of domestic crimes and her particular focus is on *Arden of Faversham* and how Alice Arden portrays herself.

Dolan comments on the role of the servant and the relationship that existed between servants and employers, servants occupying what she considers 'blurred boundaries' with servants and masters both depending and dependent on one another given the enclosed space in which they all lived.¹⁷ This is an area which could lead to conflicting

¹⁴ Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy*, p.223.

¹⁵ Catherine Belsey, 'Alice Arden's Crime in *Arden of Faversham* (1590)', in *Staging the Renaissance*, (eds.) David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (New York & London: Routledge, 1991), p.133.

¹⁶ Frances Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550-1700* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p.2.

¹⁷ Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, p.67.

loyalties and emotions, as shown by Michael in *Arden of Faversham* who finds himself promising to murder Arden whilst still remaining loyal to him. This could also be considered in the context of the relationship between Anne Drury and Trusty Roger in *A Warning for Fair Women*. Their relationship allows him to speak freely concerning her role in the seduction of Anne Sanders by George Browne.

Dolan expresses the view that there is little sense of Arden himself in the play, whilst his wife moves between the plot, her adultery with Mosby, and subplot, the plotting of her husband's murder with various subordinate characters. This could be viewed in another way. Arden is a successful man of business whether in Faversham or London, yet in his private life there is no evidence of any relationship with his wife. Their conversations focus on the preparing of his meals and his departures on business. However, what this does allow is the opportunity for Alice to portray herself as the wronged wife, perhaps in an attempt to justify adultery and murder.

Lena Cowen Orlin in *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* uses the private life of the household to discuss the cultural history of the house, its conflicts and its aspirations.¹⁸ Taking *Arden of Faversham* as an example Orlin argues that the murder put a private matter into history in Holinshed and that its dramatisation theatricalised it. She argues that post Reformation England saw the consolidation of the patriarchal authority of the household as they acquired property and wealth. This authority is best seen by contrasting the real people involved in the murder of the real person, Thomas Arden; Alyce Arden with Alice Arden, the historical with the historicised. Orlin considers in detail the historicised Alyce Arden as a scapegoat by the focus on her adultery and murder of her husband; the disorder of the household which was brought into the public domain. This focus perhaps

¹⁸ Lena Cowen Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 4.

deflecting from Arden any involvement in his own death, as a consequence of his more unpleasant, personal traits. Orlin traces Arden from his birth, possibly in Norwich, and she corrects previous attempts to ascertain the year of his birth which she places in 1508 rather than the previously accepted 1485 or 1486.¹⁹ Using official records, she traces his rise, property acquisitions and relationship with his patrons, Sir Edward North and Sir Thomas Cheyne; Arden recognised the power associated with property. Her interpretation of the historical versus the historicised provides another view of domestic drama; the bringing into the public domain of private domestic matters.

Vivianna Comensoli's *Household Business: Domestic Plays of Early Modern England* considers the particularly English genre of domestic plays in the context of her interest in gender and genre studies.²⁰ She argues, in the patriarchal structure and the importance placed on it by seventeenth century authority, that even domestic conduct books and marriage manuals were addressed to men; the aim of society was the subordination of women.²¹ She describes the setting of the plays in the gentry and yeoman classes, the rooms within their houses and properties. Within these close surroundings, domestic strife and violence were seen as a disenchantment with the 'ideal of the well-ordered civilized family'.²²

Comensoli begins by providing a definition of what she understands domestic plays to be; characters that are not aristocratic and the action taking place in domestic settings which had a strong appeal for their audiences.²³ Her intention in the book is to focus on the tragedies and comedies that 'interrogate generic and ideological codes' and she

¹⁹ Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture*, p.21.

²⁰ Vivianna Comensoli, *Household Business: Domestic Plays of Early Modern England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

²¹ Comensoli, *Household Business*, p.22.

²² Comensoli, *Household Business*, p.24.

²³ Comensoli, *Household Business*, p.3.

begins by tracing their development from the medieval morality plays.²⁴ She suggests that the appearance of domestic plays at this particular time was a response to the increase in the urban population and changes in wealth and property. The domestic plays could appeal on different levels to their audience depending on the audience's social status; part of their appeal was that some of the plays were based on contemporary crimes. Households, probably because of the changes in society, were often conflicted particularly when it came to authority. The household in *Arden of Faversham* is conflicted as a result of the subversion of authority within the household where the formidable Alice Arden is the equal of her husband as she plots, plans and manoeuvres a host of characters.

The five plays discussed in detail by Comensoli are preoccupied with the affairs of the household. Four involve husbands and wives; Rachel Merry in *Two Lamentable Tragedies* is an exception, as a single woman owes her brother, the head of the household, the duty a wife owes to her husband. This notion of the ordered patriarchal family was the ambition of Tudor authority; a microcosm of the king and his ordered kingdom. Disorder could lead to treason and tragedy within the domestic setting. *Arden of Faversham* has the subversion of the ordered household by Mosby, which is apparent in Scene 14, where Mosby sits on the sole chair in the parlour, as if he is already the head of the household. This contrast can be seen in the first scene of *A Woman Killed with Kindness* and the suggestion of the ideal household that will result from the marriage of Frankford and Anne; the apparently ideal wife possessing all the necessary qualities. The seduction of Anne by Wendoll turns this ordered household in to disorder. In Comensoli's view the same changes which brought about the development of the domestic play also brought its end as society underwent dramatic

²⁴ Comensoli, *Household Business*, p.16.

changes. The advent of Restoration plays with their plots involving love and illicit duels led to domestic drama being considered as old-fashioned.

Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda's *Staged Properties in Early Modern Drama* considered domestic plays in the context of staged properties; all movable objects on stage.²⁵ In their view this area has been neglected and a study could provide new information on a number of aspects of not only the public stage but play texts and performance. One of the chapters in the volume written by Catherine Richardson focuses on domestic objects: 'Properties of Domestic Life: The Table in Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*'.²⁶ She says that domestic tragedy concentrates on crime within the family (greed, adultery and murder). The purpose of the plays was didactic in showing the consequences of sinning and alerting the audience to the consequences of 'immoral actions within the home'.²⁷

During the period when domestic drama was at its height, the contents of the majority of households were changing as the range of goods in the early modern house increased substantially. The table in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, Richardson believes, is a crucial symbol which gives meaning to the actions of the play as a whole.²⁸ Richardson focuses in particular on Scene 8 of the play and the stage directions relating to the table as it is set first for a meal and then for a game of cards. The table provided a contemporary audience with a view of Frankford's house. Master and servants do not dine together in the hall; the servants continue to eat there but the family and guests eat in the parlour. This change reflects the physical changes in the structure of the early modern house and the separation of family and servants with

²⁵ Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda, eds. *Staged Properties in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.1.

²⁶ Catherine Richardson, 'Properties of Domestic Life, The Table in Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*' in *Staged Properties in Early Modern Drama* (eds.) Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.129.

²⁷ Richardson, Properties of Domestic Life, p.129.

²⁸ Richardson, Properties of Domestic Life, p.130.

parlours and smaller rooms replacing the hall, and separate staircases for the family and servants. The procession of servants with napkins, cloth and carpet says something of the wealth of the household to which an early modern audience, thinking of their own household goods, could relate.

Wendy Wall's *Staging Domesticity, Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* concerns English identity and how domesticity is staged, she considers this in the context of the first English published cookbooks and other domestic manuals.²⁹ Her primary sources are household manuals and early recipe books. Wall quotes a translation of *Civil Conversation* which says that 'a woman cannot possibly do any thing that may make her husband more in love with her, than to play the good huswife'.³⁰ These books tended to address the good housewife who took pride in her home, dairy and bakery and, according to Wall, even high-ranking women attended to domestic chores. This domesticity is used by playwrights to present their audience with something with which they could identify. This is an extrapolation of Adams's view, presenting a domestic setting as something an audience could identify with, and could be used to show that sinning against the laws of God would be punished. It is perhaps ironic that in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, with her array of servants and seemingly ideal domestic life, Anne Frankford is unfaithful to her husband.

Wall considers the role of the servant in detail in this play, the person privy to Anne's adultery. This is an area which had previously been considered by Dolan in the context of the threat of the near and familiar. Wall discusses Nicholas, the paid servant within the household, and his role in events. He is involved at every important moment in the play, and perhaps his most important moment is to assist Arden in discovering the lovers, having told Frankford of the liaison. Frankford's trust in him is illustrated

²⁹ Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³⁰ Wall, *Staging Domesticity*, p.12.

by his asking Nicholas to get, by degrees, copies made of the only set of household keys.

Catherine Richardson in *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy in Early Modern England* combines location and the imagination in her discussion of four of the domestic tragedies discussed by Comensoli.³¹ Location drives and shapes the action. Richardson describes how objects were bought, inherited, given as presents or saved by a young girl for her bride chest. She conveys the notion of the sense of ownership in the early modern period and what Richardson describes as not just being ‘anybody’ but ‘somebody’.³² This relates to the same sense of English identity that Wall discusses in her work. This period in English history saw an increase in the number of household objects, the household was more stable and financially secure. It was now possible to have objects other than those which were strictly necessary for everyday domestic use; the newly married Frankfords have a carpet to cover their table. Richardson selects an object with relevance to each play, an oak chair for *Arden of Faversham*, an oak table for *Two Lamentable Tragedies*, an oak chest for *A Woman Killed with Kindness* and an oak bed for *A Yorkshire Tragedy*. This work examines the spatial relationship of the early modern house and through last wills and testaments traces the history of household objects; the same household objects which appear on stage in early modern drama.³³ Richardson believes that this generation had a sense of possession of objects. This had meaning for the contemporary audience seeing these plays for the first time, and what it said to them of social status and the domestic behaviour represented on stage.³⁴

³¹ Catherine Richardson, *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy in Early Modern England: The Material Life of the Household* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

³² Richardson, *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy*, p.194.

³³ Richardson, *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy*, p.15.

³⁴ Richardson, *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy*, p.15.

Richardson wants her readers to be aware of the space within the early modern house which contained, or on stage framed, its household, suppressing tensions and secrets. Yet this was a time of order, household order was a sign of patriarchal power. As the king rules his kingdom so the master rules his household. A household that was not ordered suggested internal strife. In *Arden of Faversham*, Arden's public and business life is controlled by him as he journeys between his home, the port of Faversham and London. Yet a few lines into the play, he voices to Franklin his concerns and suspicions regarding the current state of his marriage. Although her husband may call for his supper and broth, Alice uses her home for her assignations with Mosby. This is in contrast to the honest housewife portrayed in domestic conduct books where, for a woman to preserve and maintain her good name, she should 'be resident in her owne house'.³⁵ It is in the scene of Arden's murder that this sense of disorder within the house is best illustrated. There is one chair in the parlour of the house, rather than taking it as head of the household and his rightful position, Arden gives it to the usurper of his household, Mosby, and facilitates the manner of his own death as he sits on a stool.³⁶

A review of this literature suggests that scholarly criticism in this area has moved from the broad to the narrow. Andrew Clark's study provides the basis for what later becomes the focus on a particular area, whether that is the staging of domesticity in general (Wall), or the role of a piece of furniture or stage property (Richardson). Each of the volumes discussed here brings a new understanding not only of domestic drama in general but of some of the individual plays by adding to an understanding of a particular theme, relationship or domestic object. Each of these writers has defined genre in their own way but there are some common ideas: middle or lower class

³⁵ Richardson, *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy*, p.32.

³⁶ Richardson, *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy*, p.121.

characters, domestic setting and that all important relationship between husband and wife.

Chapter 1

Three Tragic Women

This first chapter focuses on three very different women – Alice Arden, Rachel Merry and Anne Frankford - from the domestic dramas *Arden of Faversham*, *Two Lamentable Tragedies* and *A Woman Killed with Kindness* respectively. The lives led by the three characters are very different: Alice Arden is the wife of a gentleman of property in Faversham who has business interests in both the port and in London; Rachel Merry works for her brother in his tavern in Thames Street in London; and Anne Frankford is the wife of a young gentleman in Yorkshire, the owner of lands and manors.

Whilst each of these women in her own way is the subject of tragedy, they could also be viewed as being in some way a guilty party in their own tragedy. Alice Arden is burnt at the stake for the murder of her husband, which she single mindedly plans with the assistance of other characters in the play, so that she can be with her lover. Rachel Merry is caught up in the events resulting from the murder of Robert Beech and his boy, Thomas Winchester, by her brother Thomas. In contrast to her brother's actions, it is Rachel's inaction which leads to her tragedy. Anne Frankford succumbs to the charms of Wendoll, a friend of her husband and a guest in their home; with little persuasion she begins an adulterous affair with him. When the lovers are discovered by her husband, she is exiled from him, her children and her home and in a very conscious decision starves herself to death.

Alice Arden

The events surrounding Arden's murder are recorded in the *Wardmote Book* of Faversham and Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*. The

historical murder victim was Thomas Arden who in the play becomes Thomas Arden. There are two Alice Ardens who need to be considered in a discussion of the play, the real Alyce Arden, burnt at the stake in Canterbury in March 1551 for the murder of her husband on 15th February 1551, and the fictitious Alice Arden who appears in *Arden of Faversham*.

Following the dissolution of the monasteries, property previously owned by the Church was transferred to the state. Henry VIII established the Court of Augmentations in March 1536 to administer these estates; the Court also made grants of the land. The Treasurer of the Court of Augmentations was Sir Edward North and the real Thomas Arden was his assistant.¹ The lands in Faversham which had formerly belonged to the Benedictine Abbey of Faversham were sold by the Court of Augmentations to Sir Thomas Cheyne, Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, who subsequently sold the land to Arden. North rewarded Arden with the post of Commissioner of the Port of Faversham and the link between the two men was further strengthened by the marriage of Arden to North's stepdaughter Alyce Mirfyn.

According to Kentish oral tradition mentioned by Randall Martin, at the time of their marriage, Arden was fifty-nine years old and Alyce Mirfyn was twenty-eight.² As discussed in the Introduction, this has been revised by Lena Cowen Orlin. Alyce is named as Alyce Mirfyn by a number of sources, Mirfyn being the surname of her mother's second husband; Alyce's biological father was the first husband, John Brigandine. At the time of Arden's murder they had been married for six or seven years. Lena Cowen Orlin describes this marriage as one of convenience as Alyce was in love with a servant in her stepfather's household, one Thomas Morsby. In the play

¹ Lena Cowen Orlin, 'Man's House as His Castle in *Arden of Faversham*', *MRDE* 2 (1985), p.68

² Randall Martin, "'Arden winketh at his wife's lewdness, & why!': A Patrilineal Crisis in *Arden of Faversham*", *ET* 4 (2001), p.20.

this figure becomes Mosby.³ As the stepdaughter of North it could be assumed that Alyce had a comfortable upbringing. Alyce may have begun a relationship with Morsby before her marriage, whether or not it stopped before the marriage is not possible to ascertain, but she was having an adulterous relationship with him after her marriage. Holinshed refers to some anecdotal evidence that Arden was aware of the relationship but for his own selfish interests, North's patronage, he was content to 'wink at her filthy disorder, and both permitted and invited Mosbie very often to lodge in his house'.⁴

The first attempt to murder the historical Arden involved a painter who described to Alyce how to poison her husband. However, she reversed the order that the milk and the poison were placed in a bowl and her husband found his breakfast to be unpalatable. Others then became involved in the plot; through the innocent Bradshaw two former soldiers, Black Will and Shakebag, were recruited and unsuccessful attempts were made in London and on the road between the ferry and Faversham. The murderers were finally successful in Arden's own home, where he was strangled by Black Will, struck with a pressing iron by Morsby and stabbed by Alyce. When asked by the mayor and others where her husband was, Alyce gave way to lamentations but, when his clothing, together with the knife she had used was produced, she admitted her guilt. She was committed for trial and, as the murder of a husband was petty treason (25 Ed. III of 1352), she was burnt at the stake on 14th March 1551.

Forty years later the author of the play may have been of the view that the story was still sufficiently popular to be worthy of transfer to the stage and the likely source of the play was Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*. The *Wardmote Book* as a civic record would not have been generally available to the author even if he

³ Orlin, "'Man's House as His Castle'" in *Arden of Faversham*, p.68.

⁴ A. F. Hopkinson (ed.) *Play Sources: The Original Sources on which were Founded the Tragedies of Arden of Faversham & A Warning for Fair Women* (London: Sims, 1913), p.2.

was from Faversham and it is unlikely that someone from outside the town would have used it. In using Holinshed as a source, the play is at one remove from the actual events which does allow the author some freedom in his characterisation of Arden and Alice.

The events from the lives of the historical characters which are reflected in *Arden of Faversham* are that when the play opens Alice, a gentlewoman, is married to Arden and is engaged in an adulterous affair with Mosby. In the play it is unclear if this relationship predated her wedding. Alice and her lover have already agreed to murder Arden who stands in the way of their future together. Alice takes an active role alternately planning and plotting the murder and engaging various characters to murder her husband. She is one of those who stab her husband and she clears up the scene of the murder afterwards. Alice's business-like arrangements for her husband's murder reflect Arden's business dealings as he travels between Faversham and London. She promises to various co-conspirators the hand of her maid Susan (who was Mosby's sister); various amounts of money and the return of the lands her husband possesses; the lands of the former Abbey of Faversham, to those who maintain that they have a claim to them, Greene, Reede and Mosby. From the point of view of an audience, there is no information as to why Alice has committed adultery or is planning the murder of her husband. There is no indication either if at any time she was happy in her marriage. The role of arranging her husband's murder that she has taken upon herself is not what was expected of a married woman in early modern England; that is running her household and being subordinate to her husband as discussed in greater detail in the Conclusion.⁵ When a wife moves out of her expected role, having an affair as in the cases of Anne Frankford in *A Woman Killed with Kindness* and Anne Sanders in *A*

⁵ Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., 'Arden of Faversham and the Early Modern Household' in *Early Modern English Drama, A Critical Companion* (eds.) Garret A. Sullivan Jr., Patrick Cheney and Andrew Hadfield (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.74.

Warning for Women, the natural order where it is the head of the house (father, husband or brother) who is the main decision maker is subverted and tragedy ensues.

In not providing any insights into the character of Alice, the author of the play presents a portrait of Alice that an audience might not find sympathetic. There is no information as to either her motives for committing adultery or as a conspirator to murder; Alice has no soliloquies and does not address the audience directly. The Arden of the play is neither as ambitious nor as greedy as the real Arden may have been. Perhaps the author of the play may have made a decision not to portray Arden as greedy and rapacious but with a hint of both. Arden still has many business dealings between London and Faversham and, although he has obtained the lands of the Abbey of Faversham, others, just as with the historical figure, have an interest in the land. The play does not mention an incident from the life of the real Arden, which may have provided an insight into his character, when shortly before his death he had insisted that the St Valentine's Day Fair, the annual fair, be held on his lands so that he received the money from the fair rather than the townspeople.⁶ This field was where the conspirators placed his body and miraculously it bore the imprint of his body for two years. However, there is an indication of the greed of Arden in Scene 13 where Dick Reede comes to Arden before he goes to sea looking for some generosity concerning the 'plot of ground which thou detains from me' (13.32).⁷ Arden refuses and Reede leaves 'my curse with thee' (13.53).

The author of *Arden of Faversham* suggests from the opening lines that the play is set at a very specific date as if to reinforce in the minds of his audience that the events

⁶ Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Routledge, 1985), p.131.

⁷ All references are to the Oxford English Drama edition of the play edited by Martin Wiggins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pps.1-68.

in the play, allowing for artistic licence, did take place at a particular time in early modern England:

My gracious lord the Duke of Somerset
Hath freely given to thee and to thy heirs,
By letters patents from his majesty,
All the lands of the Abbey of Faversham.
Here are the deeds,
Sealed and subscribed with his name and the King's.
(1.2-7)

Franklin is not a historical figure but a character added by the author to act as a friend to whom Arden can confide his concerns about his marriage and his wife; as one of the Lord Protector's men, he indicates the powerful friends of Arden. The affair between Alice Arden and Mosby is already in progress when the play opens. As he takes and accepts the legal documents relating to the land transfer from Franklin, Arden's mind is on other documents. He tells Franklin that 'Love letters passed 'twixt Mosby and my wife' (1.15); not only have the two met secretly in the town but 'on his finger did I spy the ring / Which at our marriage day the priest put on' (1.17-18). Arden says that his wife dotes on Mosby, suggesting either that she loves Mosby excessively or that she is acting foolishly.⁸ Despite this affair, Arden still loves his wife 'For dear I hold her love, as dear as heaven' (1. 39).

The picture that an audience first sees of Alice is that of a dutiful and loving wife as she greets her husband:

Husband, what mean you to get up so early?
Summer nights are short, and yet you rise ere day.
Had I been 'wake, you had not rise so soon.
(1.57-59)

The first scene of the play shows Alice as a manipulator of people and a player of many parts; she is always conscious of her onstage audience. In the first of several similar

⁸ OED, dote (v) definition 1 and 7.

incidents, Alice has to appease her husband when he says that she called out Mosby's name in her sleep. The best excuse that she is able to come up with is to suggest that they talked about Mosby the previous night and that must be the reason, Franklin tactfully suggests 'Mistress Alice, I heard you name him once or twice' (1.78). She calls her husband 'Sweet Arden' (1.85) but a very different Alice emerges as soon as Arden leaves. She wishes for his death whilst admitting that it is Mosby who has her heart; he will be hers regardless of Arden 'of Hymen, and of rites' (1.104). Alice, it seems, has previously spoken to Michael, the Ardens' servant, about his murdering his master, which he has sworn to do in return for marriage to Susan Mosby.

Perhaps the first indication that the relationship between Alice and her lover has its uncertainties is indicated in Mosby's sending of a messenger, Adam of the Flower-de-Luce, to tell Alice that she is neither to visit him nor tell anyone of his being in Faversham (1.110-113). She gives Adam a gift to hopefully persuade Mosby to visit her, a pair of silver dice 'With which we played for kisses many a time' (1.124), a ploy which works. When Mosby arrives, she greets him as 'Mosby, my love!' (1.178), she reminds him of the promises they have made to one another; they have already agreed to murder Arden. These promises were made in her closet (1.191), a private space for Alice to be alone with her lover and away from prying eyes.⁹ To ensure Arden's death, in addition to Michael, they lose no time in arranging for a second murderer, the painter Clarke, to murder Arden. The reward is again the hand of Susan in marriage. The first suggestion from Clarke of a poisoned painting, a portrait of Alice, is discounted. Whilst Arden looks at the portrait of the wife he professes to love 'by gazing on it, perish' (1.234), someone else might die, if they chanced coming in to the room where it hangs. Alice's charms appear to have had their effect on Clarke as he tells her:

⁹ Catherine Richardson, *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p.109.

you show a noble mind,
That rather than you'll live with him you hate
You'll venture life and die with him you love.
(1.269-71).

For Alice, it is Mosby's love that gives her the courage to have her husband murdered (1.274-76). Clarke gives Alice poison and describes how she should murder her husband by putting poison in either his drink or broth but, just like this attempt on the life of the real Arden, it fails, as Arden, not liking the taste, does not continue to eat his broth.

The quick thinking Alice throws the bowl on the ground and tells Arden that 'There's nothing that I do can please your taste' (1.368) appealing to those who are there for support. Arden then says that of course he trusts her and leaving for London promises to write to her 'every other tide' (1.407). As soon as Arden leaves, the other side to Alice appears, as she congratulates herself on her quick thinking. For the third time in this opening scene she engages another murderer, Greene, who comes to confirm that Arden now owns the lands of the Abbey of Faversham. This time the tactic she uses is to portray herself as the victim of domestic abuse and to appear to take Greene in to her confidence to such an extent that he asks her if Arden:

Respects he not your birth,
Your honourable friends, nor what you brought?
Why, all Kent knows your parentage and what you are.
(1.489-91)

Here the author is making a reference to the real Alyce and her background as the stepdaughter of Sir Edward North, reminding the audience of the real murderess. As M. L. Wine comments in his introduction to the play, the marriage of Thomas Arden to North's stepdaughter was an advantageous one for him both socially and

financially.¹⁰ With this acknowledgement of her superiority from Greene, Alice seeks to take him into her confidence:

Ah, Master Greene, be it spoken in secret here,
I never live good day with him alone.
When he is at home, then have I froward looks,
Hard words, and blows to mend the match withal.
(1.492-5)

She wants Greene to believe that she lives in constant fear for her life. The business-like Alice then gives Greene ten pounds with twenty more promised when Arden is murdered. She is telling the truth when she describes herself as ‘honest Arden’s wife, not Arden’s honest wife’ (8.73).

On stage Alice presents a number of different faces, depending on whom she is speaking to and what she wants. She appears all solicitude to Arden, saying that if he loves her he will not travel to London but if he must go:

I’ll bear it as I may.
But write from London to me every week,
Nay, every day, and stay no longer there
Than thou must needs, lest that I die for sorrow.
(1.403-6)

Her husband says he will write to her on every other tide as he bids farewell to ‘sweet Alice’ (1.408).

Given the terms of address that Alice uses to her husband, it might be useful to consider how husbands and wives in the early modern period might have addressed one another. There is very little evidence, however, one source is the many conduct books printed at this date, a number of which have marriage and domestic duty as their subject. Although it was not published until 1622, after some of these plays were written, one of the most comprehensive of the books on marriage was William Gouge’s

¹⁰ M. L. Wine, (ed.) *Arden of Faversham, The Tragedy of Master*, Introduction (London: Methuen, 1973), p.lxiii.

Of Domestical Duties.¹¹ In a section entitled ‘Of the titles which wives give their husbands’ he discussed how husbands and wives should address one another in public, in private and in letters. The words used by the wife must be both reverent and meek, reverent in showing respect for her husband and meek in how she frames her speech. She must recognise her inferiority and address him with honour bearing in mind the scriptures. A stranger in the room must know that it is her husband she is addressing which is why diminutives or pet names will not do; any lightness of speech would suggest wantonness. Christian names should not be used as this is how servants were usually addressed. A wife is subject to her husband and this should be reflected in how she addresses him. This may go some way towards explaining how Alice Arden and Anne Frankford address their husbands. However it is possible to conjecture, if conduct books had to set out how husbands and wives should address one another, that some married couples addressed one another more affectionately than was advised. Edward Alleyn writing to his wife in 1593 addresses her as ‘My good sweett harte & loving mouse’.¹²

Letter writing can give an indication of how husbands and wives addressed one another but it does have to be borne in mind that a letter, of its nature, illustrates the situation at that point in time and relationships can and do change. Letters by their nature are intended for the sender and recipient only. James Daybell’s *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England* discusses letters written by women.¹³ Between 1540 and 1603 over 650 letters were written and a significant number of the letters (almost 10%)

¹¹ Kate Aughterson, (ed.) *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.91.

¹² Walter W. Greg (ed.) *Henslowe Papers being documents supplementary to Henslowe’s Diary* (London: A. H. Bullen, 1907), p.34.

¹³ James Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.205.

were from women of the professional and upper-middle-class.¹⁴ The letters between married couples which still exist illustrate that husbands and wives did use informal words of address to one another. The most common forms of address from a wife were ‘husband’ and ‘lord’, but ‘my loving husband’ and ‘my own dere lord’ were also used. Husbands used ‘dear’ or ‘beloved’ wife and nicknames and pet names such as Edward Alleyn uses. Daybell does confirm that the forms of address used by husbands were more affectionate, informal and intimate than that used by their wives showing that genuine affection and possibly love could exist within this authoritarian society.¹⁵ Lena Cowen Orlin refers to a popular contemporary theory that said ‘love goeth downward, duty goeth upward’.¹⁶ As the husband is the head of the household, he is due respect but he may address his wife (and possibly children) more affectionately than a wife who must be reverent and meek.

Alice refers to her husband as ‘husband’ (1.57), ‘sweet Arden’ (1.85), ‘Arden’ (1.96) and ‘Master Arden’ (10.81). He calls her ‘Sweet love’ (1.60), ‘sweet Alice’ (1.65) and ‘gentle Alice’ (1.87). In her husband’s presence Alice addresses her husband as a meek wife should, as this is the image she wants him to have; on the surface the perfect wife. Once Arden leaves, it is of course Sweet Mosby who is the man for her. Anne Frankford calls her husband Master Frankford and he calls her Nan. Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor* does in part confirm the use of different words in public and in private, Mistress Ford when calling for her servants says ‘What, John! What, Robert!’ (3.3.1).¹⁷ She refers to her husband as both ‘sweet Frank’ (2.1.145) and ‘Master Ford’ (3.3.188), whilst her husband refers to her as ‘Mistress

¹⁴ James Daybell, ‘Interpreting Letters and Reading Script: Evidence for Female Education and Literacy in Tudor England’, *History of Education* 34 (2005), p.698.

¹⁵ Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England*, pps.206-8.

¹⁶ Lena Cowen Orlin (ed.) *The Renaissance: A Sourcebook* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 67.

¹⁷ William Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Arden Shakespeare (ed.) H. J. Oliver, (London & New York: Routledge, 1971).

Ford' (4.2.118). In this particular context Ford, whilst mentioning her honesty, modesty and virtues, believes she has given him cause to doubt all three. In *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, Frankford's servant Nicholas is addressed by his Christian name. However, these are all examples from the theatre and the world beyond the theatre may, on occasion, have been either more or less formal.

As a result of her intrigues, Alice finds herself on a number of occasions having to explain away being with Mosby, being kissed by Mosby, calling out his name in her sleep or being seen by her husband walking arm in arm with her lover. Arden repeatedly has to retract what he has said and accept her explanations, perhaps because he does not want to believe what he sees or hears.

Alice frequently reminds Mosby of the promises they have made, yet they are each unsure of the other and may not entirely trust one another. It is probable that they each have a use for the other, Alice to have an unloved husband removed and for Mosby there is the lure of money; Alice will be a wealthy widow. Before her entrance in Scene 8, somewhat incongruously with a prayer book, Mosby is alone on stage. He talks of how he is unsure of Alice. As she has been unfaithful to Arden, she may supplant Mosby in turn: 'Tis fearful sleeping in a serpent's bed' (8.42) but he does not plan to stay with Alice forever: 'I will cleanly rid my hands of her' (8.43). In the meantime he is prepared to flatter her, just as Alice is prepared to flatter Arden. Alice still has many attractions for Mosby:

I was bewitched (that is no theme of thine!)
And thou unhallowed hast enchanted me.
But I will break thy spells and exorcisms
And put another sight upon these eyes
That showed my heart a raven for a dove.
(8.93-97)

Alice has her doubts as to the genuineness of his feelings for her and says that she 'often hath been told me by my friends, / That Mosby loves me not but for my wealth' (8.107-8). What links this couple is the desire to kill Arden and the promises they have made. It is ironic that Mosby's last line in the scene is 'I to the gates of death to follow thee.' (8.166).

After the attempts on Arden's life in London and on the way to the ferry, there is an attempt which takes place closer to home. Alice sets up a situation that forces Arden to pick a fight with Mosby. Black Will and Shakebag become involved and attempt murder again. Arden sees Alice and Mosby arm in arm and then Alice kisses Mosby. Taunted as a cuckold by Mosby, Arden draws his sword and in the ensuing *melée* Mosby is wounded. Alice accuses Arden of being foolish when it was simply a light hearted gesture to try him:

Ah, Arden, what folly blinded thee?
Ah, jealous harebrain man, what has thou done?
When we, to welcome thee, intended sport,
Came lovingly to meet thee on thy way,
Thou drew'st thy sword, enraged with jealousy,
And hurt thy friend whose thoughts were free from harm,
All for a worthless kiss and joining arms,
(Both done but merrily to try thy patience);
And me unhappy that devised the jest,
Which, though begun in sport, yet ends in blood.
(13.88-97).

She asks why he could not see that they were smiling at him (13.99). Alice then lists a number of faults that her husband finds in her; she cannot please him and when she dies it will be as a 'Poor wench abused by thy misgovernment' (13.113). Yet again within a few lines, Arden is not only begging her pardon but asking her to impose a penance upon him. To Franklin's surprise, Arden tells him to hold his peace and that he is not only going to accept Alice's advice but will 'seek out Mosby where his wound is dressed' (13.150). That night Mosby will play cards and dine in the Arden's home and

Alice will finally achieve her freedom from the marriage. After the many failed attempts at murder, the murderers are finally successful in Arden's home.

During the late sixteenth century there were a number of changes in the layout of houses and these had an effect on how the household, family and servants lived. Catherine Richardson says that originally there would have been a central hall reaching the full height of the building with the rooms in which the family lived on one side and servants' rooms on the other.¹⁸ This great hall was then divided horizontally in two with a room over the hall. The sleeping accommodation of the family moved upstairs and the room on the ground floor, the parlour, became the living space. The household no longer dined together in the Great Hall; the family ate together in the parlour and the servants in either the kitchen or servants' hall.

Alice plays the dutiful wife and hostess, organising supper and cards for their guests in what is probably the parlour of the house. Arden is strangled by Black Will, stabbed by Mosby (rather than struck as was the real Arden with a pressing iron) and Alice, who strikes the fatal blow 'Take this for hind'ring Mosby's love and mine' (14.232). It is the ever practical Alice who organises the cleaning of the floor, helped by Susan. When the Mayor and Watch arrive she presents to them the appearance of a concerned and worried wife who suddenly feels in her heart that all is not well 'I know something's amiss' (14.300), but once Franklin has found the hand towel and the knife and Arden's blood, Alice has an explanation for everything; the stains the townspeople see are from pig's blood they had for supper or a cup of wine spilt by the servant. The crime she has committed does not change Alice; she still presents the appearance of a caring wife as she stands in the field where Arden's body has been discovered. However what her words tell is something different: 'The more I sound his name, the

¹⁸ Richardson, *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy*, p.83

more he bleeds. / This blood condemns me' (16.4-5). Cruentation was a common belief at this date, that a murdered body would identify its murderer by bleeding when touched by the murderer.¹⁹ She calls him 'Arden, sweet husband' (16.3):

Forgive me, Arden; I repent me now,
And, would my death save thine, thou shouldst not die.
Rise up, sweet Arden, and enjoy thy love,
And frown not on me when we meet in heaven:
In heaven I love thee though on earth I did not.
(16.7-11)

Her thoughts continue to be self-centred as she and her fellow conspirators are led off. The unfortunate Bradshaw, who is innocent but has been condemned, asks her to speak the truth, that he was not part of the plot, her answer is:

Leave now to trouble me with worldly things,
And let me meditate upon my saviour Christ,
Whose blood must save me for the blood I shed.
(18.9-11)

Alice is still playing a role as she goes to her death. She tells Mosby that if it were not for him she would never have been a strumpet. She says that she believes in divine forgiveness and that her death will 'make amends for all my sins' (18.33). This appearance of remorse is the last of the many parts she has played. The Alice Arden of *Arden of Faversham* is shown as a clever woman who manipulates every man that she encounters. She uses language to cajole and placate Arden, to spurn or attract Mosby and to engage Michael, Greene, Clarke, Black Will and Shakebag as accomplices to murder. She is able to use rhetoric to enforce her views on marriage and that Mosby will be hers:

Love is a god, and marriage is but words;
And therefore Mosby's title is the best.
Tush! Whether it be or no, he shall be mine

¹⁹ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin, 1973), p.261.

In spite of him, of Hymen, and of rites.

(1.101-4)

Her verbal dexterity (and possibly the sexual attraction that she has for Mosby) bends men to her will. Her maid Susan is used by Alice as the 'reward' for the successful murder of Arden by either Michael or Clarke. Alice's single handed determination to free herself from her marriage and to engage in the murder of her husband ensures that it is she alone who is responsible for her own tragedy.

Rachel Merry

During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the city of London had four main streets. One of these, Thames Street, ran beside the river from Blackfriars to the Tower of London. Thames Street in London in the sixteenth century had a mix of inhabitants from alderman to pauper, rich to poor, all living cheek by jowl in streets, alleys and courts. It is in this street that the domestic tragedy, one of the two murders in *Two Lamentable Tragedies*, takes place. Although geographically far from Faversham or York, it is set in a small community with fellow citizens rather than servants watching events. It is 'In some darke place nere to Bainardes castle' (1603) that Merry plans to leave the head and legs of Thomas Beech after murdering him.²⁰ Thames Street contained an open sewer leading to the river 'that streete whose side the river Thames / Doth strive to wash from all impuritie' (96-7). Baynard's Castle was one of the most important buildings on Upper Thames Street. It had been the London residence of the Duke of York during the Wars of the Roses.²¹ The Three Cranes where the servant Williams moves to after Beech's murder also did exist; a number of

²⁰ All references are to Robert Yarrington, *Two Lamentable Tragedies*, Malone Society Reprints (ed.) Chiaki Hanabusa (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

²¹ Alison Weir, *Lancaster & York: The Wars of the Roses*, (London: Pimlico, 1998), pps.132-3.

alehouses grew up backing onto the Thames in East London.²² To an audience in 1595, the street with its buildings, their upper storeys jutting out over the ground floor would have been familiar and regardless of their class, they could bring their knowledge of the area and its inhabitants with them to the theatre. Rachel Merry has a very different life from Alice Arden; she lives with her brother above the tavern where they sell beer, bread and possibly other provisions in Thames Street. The households of the poorer alehouses were small, averaging 3.7 people resembling the household of the alehouse in Thames Street, although not all alehouses had a servant.²³ Many alehouses were family businesses and for Thomas Merry his sister was cheap labour. Rachel helps serve customers as well as ‘dressing up the house’ (153) which she is doing before she makes her first entrance. In general, alehouses were not places that a woman would enter on her own without risking her reputation so Rachel Merry is socially isolated.²⁴ This is a world that is far away from both the countryside around Frankford’s manors in *A Woman Killed with Kindness* and the port of Faversham in *Arden of Faversham*. Thames Street has houses and businesses, some, probably like the Merrys’, with living accommodation over the shop. There is a sense of community and neighbourliness, evident in the actions of the residents after the murders of Robert Beech and his boy, Thomas Winchester.

The world of Rachel Merry is a narrow one, lived within the confines of Thames Street and the tavern; there is no division between home and working life.²⁵ Peter Clark describes a typical alehouse as not being purpose built but with the private living space overlapping with the public drinking space.²⁶ Fixtures and fittings were of the

²² Peter Clark, *The English Alehouse: A Social History 1200-1830*, (London & New York: Longman, 1983), p.70.

²³ Clark, *The English Alehouse*, p.78.

²⁴ Clark, *The English Alehouse*, p.131.

²⁵ Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London, Routledge, 1919), p.290

²⁶ Clark, *The English Alehouse*, p.66.

cheapest and resembled those of poorer households; at most there was a fire, trestle tables, stools and a few chairs. The vessels for drinking would have been limited in number and inexpensive. Her brother decides what she will do, whether calling her to serve customers –

Goe draw these gentlemen two Cans of beare,
Your negligence that cannot tend the shop,
Will make our customers forsake the house.
(149-51)

- or telling her to go back and tend the house when she tells him that ‘your man he is not verie well: / But sitteth sleeping by the kitchen fier’ (153-54). Merry’s influence over his sister in how she lives her life is very clear throughout the play, this is evident at her first entrance, she refers to Williams as ‘your man’, not as ‘our servant’ or ‘our man’ or even ‘the servant’.

Unfortunately for Rachel, Merry is unhappy with his lot in life:

I live in meane and discontented state,
But wherefore should I think of discontent:
I am belov’d, I have a pretty house,
A loving sister, and a carefull man,
That doe not thinke their dayes worke well at end,
Except it bring me in some benefit:
And well frequented is my little house,
With many guests and honest passengers,
(116-23)

Despite his loving sister and his careful man working hard for his benefit, Merry is greedy, he has to pay more than he feels he should for provisions ‘my beare, my bread, my meate: / My fagots, coales’ (213-14). As the brewing and selling of beer were separate businesses, regulated by the government with the purpose of simplifying the collection of excise, Merry would have had to buy the ale he sold.²⁷ Beech’s money would make his life easier. Beech is a wealthy chandler with a business in Thames

²⁷ Clark, *Working Life of Women*, p.223

Street and he is one of Merry's friends who come to 'drinke some beare or ale' (128). Alehouses did not sell wine but sold buns or cake, Merry sells bread, which was sometimes given free with a drink.²⁸ He is not prepared to wait for any advantages or money that may come his way in time. He will take action to get what he wants sooner, yet despite the murders of Beech and his boy, neither money nor any other advantages materialise.²⁹ In *Arden of Faversham*, the reputation of London alehouses has reached north Kent: Alice Arden comments that 'In London many alehouse ruffians keep, / Which, as I hear, will murder men for gold' (1.444-5).

When Rachel's brother brings Beech to their home, Williams questions her as to who went upstairs with Merry; she says that it was 'a little man / Of black complexion' (474-75); the devil was often described as such. There is a woodcut dating from 1591 used as an illustration in a pamphlet, *Sundry strange and inhumanie Murthers, lately committed*, describing the murder of three sons by a man hired by their father to kill them.³⁰ The devil appears on the left of the illustration, dressed in black and with his cloven hands and feet visible.³¹ From the moment that Merry first commits murder it is Rachel who recognises what the consequences of these actions are: she tells her brother that they 'are undone' (483). Later she asks her brother, 'Where shall we hide this trumpet of your shame, / This timelesse ugly map of cruelty' (696-97). After Williams decides that he cannot remain in Merry's house - 'I will not stay an houer within your house, / It is the wickedest deed that ere was done' (512-13) - and leaves for the Three Cranes, she worries about his loyalty: if he speaks they will be punished. She is a

²⁸ Clark, *The English Alehouse*, p.132.

²⁹ Lena Cowen Orlin, 'Familial Transgressions, Social Transition on the Elizabethan Stage' in *Sexuality and Politics in Renaissance*, *Studies in Renaissance Literature* 10 (Lewiston, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), p.35.

³⁰ Peter Lake with Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists, and Players in Post Reformation England* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), p.46.

³¹ Joseph H. Marshburn and Alan R. Velie, *Blood and Knavery, A Collection of English Renaissance Pamphlets and Ballads of Crime and Sin* (Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1973), frontispiece.

realist and wants Merry to remain in contact with Williams so that they can ensure his silence, asking her brother on one occasion why he did not bring him back to dinner.

Unlike Williams, Rachel is a single woman with no independence, financial or otherwise. Her sole male protector is her brother; she has no choice but to continue living with him after the murders. Traditionally the role of a woman was as maid, wife and mother; Rachel Merry has no prospect of changing her role; she will remain a maid. Single women were expected to live as dependents in the houses of their fathers or other male relatives; if servants, then they lived in their master's household. Civic officials did not want single women living independently in their parishes and cities did issue orders against single young people living on their own.³² They were worried that sexual immortality would ensue; there was a thin line between a single woman and a prostitute. According to Lena Cowen Orlin, Rachel owes her brother the obedience that a married woman would owe to her husband.³³ The hierarchical structure of the relationship between brother and sister is illustrated by the way Merry tells his sister when and when not to serve customers, when to keep house, and to go and buy the bag to conceal the body. Yet, she is resolutely loyal to her brother, she will not betray him but will cover it up rather than have it said that she betrayed her brother:

Lo he is my brother, I will cover it,
And rather die then have it spoken rife,
Lo where she goes, betrai'd her brothers life.
(1619-21)

Rachel, in common with Alice Arden, has to clean up after the murder of Beech, she tells her brother that she wishes that she could 'As cleerely wash your conscience from the deed, / As I can cleanse the house' (965-66). Richardson describes Rachel's role as

³² Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.20.

³³ Orlin, 'Familial Transgressions', p.35.

that of lamenting her brother's actions; she also represents Merry's conscience.³⁴ She tells him, had she known of his intention in advance, she would then have dissuaded him from murder 'We are undone, brother we are undone' (483), and will pay for the crime. Rachel helps her brother cover Beech's body with faggots and gives him the knife with which he cuts it up. She asks how he can 'finde in hart to cut and carve' (1200) but Merry, pragmatic as ever, has no qualms and replies, 'I marry can I fetch the chopping knife' (1203). This is not something Rachel can watch, as she considers this barbarous (1208) and believes his soul will burn in the flames of hell (1248). She does attempt to dissuade her brother from murdering Thomas Winchester, and suggests that the boy may not have seen Merry with Beech; she will visit the boy and see if he will ask for his master.

She has low self-esteem and her life is lived in relation to the principal male in it; her brother; this is the hierarchical nature of their relationship.³⁵ Merry recognises this: 'Rachel, I see thy love is infinite' (927). Rachel tells him what the consequences of his actions are for him: 'Oh my deare brother, what a heape of woe, / Your rashness hath powrd downe upon your head' (693-94). She either ignores or does not want to recognise that his actions will also have drastic consequences for her. She describes herself as 'your sister, though a silly Maide, / Ile be your true and faithfull comforter' (925-26). In describing herself as a silly maid Rachel may mean that she is deserving of pity or sympathy and that she is a helpless woman.³⁶ Each of these on their own is sufficient to require that her brother should be her comforter and protector, but he is neither. Merry knows the depth of his sister's love for him and takes advantage of her loyalty to him after the double murders. He tells the constable that she is innocent and only cleaned up after the murders. Rachel says that her brother knows she is innocent

³⁴ Richardson, *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy*, p.132.

³⁵ Orlin, 'Familial Transgressions', p.35.

³⁶ *OED*, silly (adj) 1(a) and (b).

and did not consent to either of the murders. But his avowal of her innocence is not enough and she will hang with her brother, even as Merry begs forgiveness for what he did. Williams, who knew of the murders, has pleaded benefit of clergy. This was a system which allowed criminals to be handed over to the ecclesiastical, rather than the secular courts, on the basis of a literacy test: the reading of Psalm 51 'Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness' when in practice a criminal may have learnt the words by rote. Church courts did not pass a sentence of death, instead the miscreant was branded on the fleshy part of the palm at the base of the thumb with a letter describing his offence, in Williams's case the 'M' for murderer.³⁷ Unfortunately for Rachel, pleading benefit of clergy did not apply to women until 1624, as Truth comments, 'But wretched *Rachels* sexe denies that grace / And therefore dooth receive a doome of death' (2398-99). Rachel says of Williams, 'thou art branded with a marke of shame' (2693).

Even as she goes to the scaffold Rachel is still thinking of herself, but not in the same way as Alice Arden. She forgives her brother and the tears she sheds are not because she is afraid to die:

But I lament for that it hath beene said,
I was the author of this crueltie,
And did produce you to this wicked deede,
Whereof God knowes that I am innocent.
(2633-36)

Rachel does show a degree of independence as she mounts the ladder to the scaffold and asserts herself by making a speech. Catherine Belsey comments that speaking on the scaffold offered women a place not only to speak from but to speak with authority.³⁸ This scaffold speech combines many elements, seeking human forgiveness and hoping for divine forgiveness, blaming Williams for his part in her death and a

³⁷ Martin Wiggins, *Journeyman in Murder: The Assassin in English Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p.16.

³⁸ Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy*, p.190.

warning to sisters of their brothers. It is Rachel's longest speech and perhaps suggests that in other circumstances there is a strong minded woman:

Come let me clime these steps that lead to heaven,
Although they seeme the staires of infamie:
Let me be mirror to ensuing times,
And teach all sisters how they do conceale,
The wicked deeds, of brethren, or of friends,
I not repent me of my love to him,
But that thereby I have provoked God,
To heavie wrath and indignation,
Which turne away great God, for Christes sake.
A *Harry Williams*, thou wert chieftest cause,
That I do drinke of this most bitter cup,
For hadst thou opened *Beeches* death at first,
The boy had liv'd, and thou hadst sav'd my life:
But thou art branded with a marke of shame,
And I forgive thee from my very soule,
Let him and me, learne all that heare of this,
To utter brothers or their maisters misse,
Conceale no murther, least it do beget,
More bloody deeds of like deformitie.
Thus God forgive my sinnes, receive my soule,
though my dinner be of bitter death,
I hope my soule shall sup with Jesus Christ,
And see his presence everlastingly.

(2680-702)

The speech is in complete contrast to Alice Arden's last speech in *Arden of Faversham*. Rachel recognises that what Merry did was wicked but she is still generous to both him and to Williams, whom she forgives. Merry is not mentioned by name, her remarks are general, perhaps showing a generosity of spirit that is not deserved by Merry. Based on what has happened to her, she gives a warning to others of the danger of concealing murder. Her plea for divine forgiveness and redemption is genuine.

Rachel Merry's tragedy lies in her love of and loyalty to her brother: he is the most important person in her life and Merry perhaps depends on this loyalty to him to keep her silent. She has no female friend to turn to for advice or help. She cannot think of

any way out of her situation: fleeing is not an option without money and, in the absence of any potential spouse, marriage is not an option either.

Anne Frankford

The main plot of *A Woman Killed with Kindness* sets out the events from the marriage of John and Anne Frankford to her death a few years later. Anne commits adultery with Wendoll, who has been invited in to their home as a guest by her husband. When her husband learns of the affair, Anne is exiled from him and their children (but with all her belongings) to one of her husband's manors. Overcome with remorse she starves herself to death, but on her deathbed she is reunited with her husband, receives his forgiveness and he restores the name of wife to her.

A Woman Killed with Kindness begins with a celebration following the marriage of John Frankford and his bride Anne. It gathers together not only the married couple but others who play a part in the ensuing events, Wendoll with whom Anne commits adultery and Nicholas, who will tell Frankford of his wife's adultery. According to Ann Jennalie Cook, the average age of marriage for the gentry was about twenty for women and twenty five for men.³⁹ For her wedding at this date, a woman may not necessarily have had a new gown but would probably have worn her best gown. There are entries in Henslowe's diary which suggest how the actor playing the role of Anne Frankford might have been costumed.⁴⁰ Dated 3rd and 5th of February 1603, payments are recorded to a tailor and to Thomas Heywood for black velvet and satin for a woman's gown for the play *A Woman Killed with Kindness*; perhaps this was the bride's wedding gown. For a middle-class bride at this date, the gown would have been

³⁹ Ann Jennalie Cook, *Making a Match: Courtship in Shakespeare and His Society* (Princeton, N.J., & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1991), p.18.

⁴⁰ R. A. Foakes, (ed.) *Henslowe's Diary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pps.223 and 225.

close-fitting with a low rounded neckline and worn over a farthingale which was usually worn by wealthy women.⁴¹ The bodice would have had a long pointed waist and fastenings of buttons, ribbon or lace down the front and may have had a fan shaped standing collar. Sleeves were often inside a false outer sleeve. Shoes would have been of leather with a low cork wedge which may have had a leather sole.⁴² A bride may have worn her hair loose or in a plait as this was a symbol of virginity. She may have added a gold head ornament such as one of the ornate tires which were fashionable in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.⁴³

The marriage service in the reformed Church of England would have taken place inside the church. In the opening scene of the play the couple are with friends celebrating their wedding. This group may have accompanied the couple to church, just as the form of Solemnisation of Matrimony in the *Book of Common Prayer* sets down:

At the day appointed for solemnization of Matrimonie, the persons to be married, shall come into body of the Church with their friends and neighbours⁴⁴

Festive celebrations of marriage were recognised as important, adding to the honour of the occasion; David Cressy refers to William Gouge who described the customs associated with a marriage, the accompanying of the bridegroom and bride to and from the church, all wearing their best clothes and feasting.⁴⁵

Anne Frankford and her brother Sir Francis Acton appear in two scenes together, the first and last scenes. At the wedding feast in Scene 1 it is Sir Francis who calls for

⁴¹ Alison Sim, *Pleasures & Pastimes in Tudor England* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2002), p.39.

⁴² Sim, *Pleasures & Pastimes*, p.45.

⁴³ Charles Nicholl, *The Lodger: Shakespeare on Silver Street* (London: Penguin, 2008), pps.139-40.

⁴⁴ *The Book of Common Prayer* (London: Richard Barker, 1600).

⁴⁵ David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.353.

music and the bridal dance, it is he 'by your husband's leave' (1.7)⁴⁶ who leads his sister in the dance. He encourages (unsuccessfully) his new brother-in-law to join in the dance. As they watch the couple dancing, Sir Charles Mountford, a young knight who seems to be friends with the families of the couple, wishes Frankford happiness in his marriage. He then expands on the many qualities possessed by Anne which make her the ideal wife:

You are a happy man, sir; and much joy
Succeed your marriage mirth, you have a wife
So qualified and with such ornaments
Both of the mind and body. First, her birth
Is noble, and her education such
As might become the daughter of a prince.
Her own tongue speaks all tongues, and her own hand
Can teach all strings to speak in their best grace,
From the shrill treble to the hoarsest bass.
To end her many praises in one word,
She's Beauty and Perfection's eldest daughter,
Only found by yours, though many a heart hath sought her.
(1.14-25)

Anne is not only beautiful but is well educated and a talented musician. Her ability to speak in all tongues may not mean that she is a linguist; Sir Charles may be suggesting that her manner leads her to converse easily with everyone regardless of who they are. Anne Frankford comes from a family of the upper gentry; her brother has been knighted presumably for services to his monarch. A woman of this class would be expected to make a marriage to a man of at least the same class and, whatever education she received, would fit her for that role. Given her virtues as they are discussed at her wedding, it is reasonable to assume that a woman who could read English, and perhaps Latin, may have been able to read music if she played the lute. In

⁴⁶ All references are to the Oxford English Drama edition of the play edited by Martin Wiggins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pps.71-128.

the newly Protestant England, emphasis was placed on education and a woman who could read, could read and study the bible.

It is not easy to establish the degree of education that women received in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Before the dissolution of the monasteries a number of girls were educated at nunnery schools. Following the dissolution, boys could be educated at the newly established grammar schools, but the choices for girls were limited given that they were now excluded from the main centres of learning. Documentary sources are therefore limited as to what organised education for girls existed but it is likely to have taken place within the household.⁴⁷ Their teacher may have been their mother, other relative, family friend or clergyman. They may have attended a petty school and learnt to read using a hornbook. Women such as Thomas More's daughter, Margaret Roper, were the exception rather than the rule, given what women needed to know, an academic education was not a necessity.⁴⁸ For girls the aim of whatever education they received was to give them the housekeeping skills that they needed to be a good wife and housewife and manage the household of their husband. There is however a double meaning of the words housewife and hussy. A meaning of hussy from 1530 is that of the thrifty housewife and although the *Oxford English Dictionary* dates the word meaning a disreputable woman or improper behaviour to 1647, there are examples of the word having this meaning at an earlier date.⁴⁹ In the play *Beauty and Housewifery* (1582), the 'housewifery' is likely to refer to sexual rather than domestic matters.⁵⁰ Women would need to know a variety of skills including weaving and spinning, dressing meat and keeping their accounts, music and

⁴⁷ Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England*, p.12.

⁴⁸ Sim, *Pleasures & Pastimes*, p.142.

⁴⁹ *OED*, hussy, (n) definition 1 and 3.

⁵⁰ Martin Wiggins in association with Catherine Richardson, *British Drama 1533-1642: A Catalogue*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012-), p.308.

reading.⁵¹ The early modern English household operated as an economic unit.⁵² The ethos in the education of boys and girls was very different; boys were educated for public roles so that they could serve the state as able administrators and girls to run their husbands' households.⁵³

A suggestion as to the number of women who could read is indicated by the number of books printed for a female readership. Half of the books printed were practical guides ranging from needlework to how to deal with servants and prepare the medications needed for family and servants, and often went in to several editions.⁵⁴ Peter Clark, who reviewed the ownership of books in three Kentish towns, one of which was Faversham, said that in the early seventeenth century the ownership of books by women was 25% compared to 40% of men.⁵⁵ However, reading and writing were taught as two separate skills, so there were more women who could read but not write.

Anne Frankford is relatively silent in her first scene, speaking just eight and a half lines. This reluctance could suggest that Heywood is setting up the audience for Anne's fall from grace. He presents this picture of an ideal bride, reticent and meek in the presence of her husband. During the course of the play he will show that she is neither ideal nor virtuous; Anne Frankford is not as she appears. Patricia Meyer Spacks says that Anne, who seems to be all that a woman should be, is subsequently revealed,

⁵¹ Suzanne W. Hull, *Chaste, Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women 1475-1640* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982), p.3.

⁵² Ann Christensen, 'Business, Pleasure, and the Domestic Economy in Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*', *Exemplaria* 9 (1997), p.316.

⁵³ James Daybell, 'Interpreting letters and reading script: evidence for female education and literacy in Tudor England', *History and Education* (2005), p.696.

⁵⁴ Hull, *Chaste, Silent & Obedient*, pps.31 and 35.

⁵⁵ Peter Clark, 'Ownership of Books in England 1560—1640', in *Schooling and Society: Studies in the History of Education*, (ed.) Lawrence Stone (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), p.99.

as an adulteress.⁵⁶ As a woman, she is part of the monetary transaction between men, in this case between her brother and her husband, which reflects the socio-economic status of Jacobean women.⁵⁷ Although Anne's consent to the marriage was required, this does not mean that she is happy with her marriage. The men at the wedding feast do not refer to Anne by name; she is 'wife' or 'bride'. Perhaps what the men are doing, on seeing this figure of a bride, is projecting on to her the virtues of an ideal wife and this is the woman that they discuss.

A silence such as Anne's has been described by Philip McGuire as an open silence; that is, a silence imposed on a character who is alive.⁵⁸ In a discussion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, McGuire describes the silence between Hippolyta and Theseus as a factor in defining the nature of their relationship.⁵⁹ In *A Woman Killed with Kindness* this can be illustrated in performance by director and actors. Such an opportunity presents itself when Frankford decides to withdraw with his wife. His comment is in the singular; 'I'll leave you here' (1.79); perhaps he is unused to speaking for both of them. In performance, director and actors must decide whether there is any stage business as Frankford and Anne withdraw. If he wanted to indicate some degree of feeling between the couple, Frankford could offer his arm to his bride and they could exit together. If distance between the two was to be conveyed, Frankford could stand aside and let his wife exit ahead of him. Throughout the play, husband and wife do not have any scenes with just the two of them; they are never alone on stage, so there is no sense of the intimacy between them. An audience has to

⁵⁶ Patricia Meyer Spacks, 'Honor and Perception in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*' *MLQ* 20 (1959), p.323.

⁵⁷ Richard Dutton (ed.) Ben Jonson, *Epicene, or The Silent Woman*, Revels Plays, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), Introduction, p. 89.

⁵⁸ Philip C. McGuire, '*Speechless dialect*': *Shakespeare's Open Silences*, (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1985), p.xiv.

⁵⁹ McGuire, '*Speechless dialect*', p.11.

use its own imagination and experience to have a picture of the relationship between husband and wife from the beginning of the marriage to Anne's adultery.

The parlour is the setting for many scenes in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, but some of the actions take place in private rooms that the audience do not see: the chamber where Anne and Wendoll dine together, the bedchamber where Frankford finds the lovers. As the relationship between the two lovers develops they move from the larger public rooms to the smaller private and more intimate spaces, just as Alice Arden and her lover Mosby do, meeting in private in her closet.⁶⁰

Although Wendoll is present at the wedding feast, Anne's interest in him becomes apparent in Scene 4 when he arrives to tell Frankford of the events at the hawk flying. Anne enters with the servant and Wendoll, telling her husband that he brings news. What is interesting from the following lines is that she already knows what has happened between her brother and Sir Charles:

O, but you hear not all!
Sir Francis lost, and yet was loath to yield.
In brief the two knights grew to difference,
From words to blows, and so to banding sides,
Where valorous Sir Charles slew in his spleen
Two of your brother's men: his falconer
And his good huntsman, whom he loved so well.
More men were wounded, no more slain outright.
(4.44-51)

From the details which she provides, it is clear that not only have she and Wendoll talked together, but the conversation must have been of some duration. It might be possible to infer that Anne is not averse to him and is happy to spend some time in conversation with him. Wendoll it seems is a persuasive talker, something that Anne comments on in a later scene.

⁶⁰ Richardson, *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy*, pps.154 and 165.

Anne changes in one scene from a dutiful wife to a woman prepared to commit adultery with a guest in her own home. Scene 6 sees both Anne and Wendoll confused and bewildered by their feelings for one another and how they have got to this point. Wendoll alternately talks of his love for Anne interspersed with the loyalty he owes to Frankford as his host and friend. Anne reminds him of this when he declares his feelings for her. Anne finally admits that he 'hath enchanted me. This maze I am in / I fear will prove the labyrinth of sin' (6.158-9). Her use of the word maze confirms her sense of bewilderment or incoherence and her stupefied state.⁶¹ Labyrinth could mean that she is now in a situation from which she cannot extract herself and her subsequent actions will result in the sin of adultery.

The Frankford household includes both male and female servants who celebrate the marriage of Frankford and Anne with their own country dancing in Scene 2. The servant who is most closely involved with events is Nicholas, Frankford's personal servant, a role similar to that of valet. In Scene 4 he takes a dislike to Wendoll, whom Frankford welcomes in to his home and opens home and purse to him, something he makes known to the other servants. Jenkin, another servant, is quick to point out to Wendoll in Scene 6 that the mistress of the household is Mistress Frankford not Mistress Wendoll. He almost goes out of his way to tell Wendoll that Anne is seeing her husband set out on his journey and 'went very lovingly to bring him on his way to horse' (6.62-3).

Later in the same scene Nicholas watches Anne and Wendoll together. Loyal to both his master and mistress, he is prepared to do Wendoll harm. He plans to watch the lovers and in a line curiously in the past tense says of Anne, 'For she was fair and chaste' (6.178), suggesting that Anne has already been corrupted by Wendoll, whom he

⁶¹ *OED*, maze (v) definition 1.

considers to be a knave. This is Nicholas's view of Anne rather than his expressing a fact. Perhaps reflecting the genuine affection in which he holds Anne, he cannot bring himself in the last line of the scene to say aloud what he thinks of her: 'If they proceed as they have done before, / Wendoll's a knave, my mistress is a ...'(6.180-81). It is difficult to establish definitely the reason for the missing word, which is easily guessed from the rhyming couplet. Heywood may have included the word and later the printer may have deleted it as a form of self-censorship. If Heywood deliberately did not include the word, it may have been to indicate Nicholas's emotion as he exits the stage. Martin Wiggins suggests that Nicholas's reluctance to utter the word is due to his attempts to copy his betters and refrain from crudity.⁶² In performance the silence could be accompanied by a gesture as Nicholas exits. Throughout the remainder of the play Anne is regarded with loyalty by her servants, a number of whom lay the blame for the affair on Wendoll, Nicholas refers to Wendoll's 'vile, notorious tricks' (8.17). Even as he tells Frankford of Anne's affair, Nicholas still refers to her as 'my mistress' (8.53). Nicholas is one of those present at Anne's death bed in Scene 17 although there is no mention of his entrance; he may have entered with Frankford at line 65. He has one line: after Frankford who has been overcome by the sight of Anne says that he wishes to die with her, Nicholas says he will 'sigh and sob, but, by my faith, not die' (17.97). A realist, he will mourn and grieve for his former mistress, but to a limit.

Nicholas becomes an important part of Frankford's plan to enter his house secretly and discover the lovers. His evidence when questioned by Frankford as to the affair is his own eyes. Given the layout of houses in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries it would have been difficult to keep their relationship a secret from all or any of the servants. The basic unit of society was the household, domestic order being a

⁶² Martin Wiggins, (ed.) *A Woman Killed with Kindness and other Domestic Plays*, Oxford English Drama (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.309.

microcosm of the order within the state and the power of a parish or neighbourhood being dependent on order within the household. According to Laura Gowing, the stories told of illicit sex and adultery were usually about women, the stories often coming from either neighbours or servants.⁶³ The early modern household included servants, and perhaps apprentices, and provided little in the way of privacy in their layout and design. As Gowing says 'walls were thin, keyholes large, and partitions of cloth easy to pull aside'.⁶⁴ This living in close proximity could, on stage, advance the action of a play, with servants aware of the adultery of master or mistress and possibly sharing this with the audience.

In Scene 8 Frankford learns of his wife's infidelity from his servant, news which strikes him with an almost physical blow, as if something sharp had pierced his heart and he is 'plunged into a strange agony' (8.59). He sends Nicholas away and before calling for servants and guests he speaks of Anne. Rather than condemning his wife, he still speaks of her as the woman who is an ideal wife:

She is well born, descended nobly;
Virtuous her education; her repute
Is in the general voice of all the country
Honest and fair; her carriage, her demeanour
In all her actions that concern the love
To me her husband, modest, chaste, and godly.
(8.93-8)

These lines are an echo of what was said about Anne in the first scene of the play with references again to her noble birth and education which makes her the ideal wife. His condemnation is reserved for Wendoll 'that Judas that hath borne my purse, / And sold me for a sin' (8.100-01). However, he decides to banish all thoughts and say or do nothing until he knows all.

⁶³ Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pps.188-89.

⁶⁴ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p.190.

Later in this scene, the Frankfords together with Wendoll and a guest, Cranwell, have supper and then play cards. As they play cards, more than one game is being played; Frankford knows of Anne's relationship with Wendoll and the lovers have their own game. There is verbal word play between Frankford and Wendoll as to who shall partner Anne. This allows Frankford to say, 'I do not like that match' (8.125), and to issue a warning to Wendoll: 'I must look to you, Master Wendoll, for you will be playing false; nay, so will my wife, too' (8.130-1). Under cover of the game, Wendoll can describe himself as a knave and Anne says she is a queen; in an aside Frankford converts this to 'quean'. This suggests that Frankford no longer thinks of Anne as the ideal wife but as disreputable. Anne and Frankford use words from a card game to describe their feelings. Anne wishes that she 'had never dealt' (8.166) perhaps suggesting that she is beginning to regret the affair with Wendoll. Frankford admitting that his mind is not entirely on the game of cards [Aside] 'Many a deal I have lost, the more's your shame. / [Aloud] You have served me a bad trick, Master Wendoll' (8.170-1). He has lost out in the game on the cards that have been dealt him; he has lost not just the bidding but has lost Anne to Wendoll who has cheated him at cards and of his wife.

After Frankford's sudden departure on the supposed trip to York, Wendoll suggests to Anne that they dine in her private chamber, something she regards as being too public given the intimacy it implies. At this time family and guests would have dined in the parlour, if dining alone husband and wife might dine in their private chamber. Anne agrees to the suggestion but not with a marked enthusiasm for spending time with Wendoll, having already tempted her once, perhaps tempting her again is simply a habit. An indication of the continuing relationship and the intimacy between them is

Wendoll's use of her husband's name for her, calling her Nan. He is also usurping Frankford's role as head of the household by suggesting where they should sup.⁶⁵

In Scene 13, Frankford returns secretly to discover the lovers together. He describes the rooms in his home that he traverses and hopes that he will not resort to 'any violent outrage' (13.32). After Wendoll has fled, Frankford confronts his wife and questions her. The order of his questions is interesting, he first asks about physical comforts, Wendoll and lastly of his feelings for her:

<i>Frankford.</i>	Was it for want Thou playedst the strumpet? Was thou not supplied With every pleasure, fashion, and new toy – Nay, even beyond my calling?
<i>Anne.</i>	I was.
<i>Frankford.</i>	Was it then disability in me, Or in thine eye seemed he a properer man?
<i>Anne.</i>	O no.
<i>Frankford:</i>	Did I not lodge thee in my bosom? Wear thee here in my heart?
<i>Anne.</i>	You did.
	(13.106-113)

Frankford's punishment of his wife is that she is banished with all her goods, presumably taking everything that might possibly remind him of her, to one of his manors. Laura Bromley takes the view that in the play Heywood is dramatizing for the new middle-class seeing the play a code of gentlemanly conduct.⁶⁶ Frankford considers himself to be a gentleman and at the beginning of Scene 4 describe himself as such whilst setting out for an audience what it means to be a 'gentleman':

I am a gentleman, and by my birth
Companion with a king. A king's no more,
I am possessed of many fair revenues,
Sufficient to maintain a gentleman.
(4.3-6)

⁶⁵ Richardson, *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy*, pps.162-63.

⁶⁶ Laura G. Bromley, 'Domestic Conduct in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*' *SEL* 28 (1986), p.260.

It is reasonable to assume that Nicholas, as Frankford's servant, has occupied an important place in the home and in Anne's married life. When he comes to her in Scene 16 from Frankford carrying her lute as she leaves for exile in one of Frankford's manors, she is perhaps hoping for some message or even reprieve from Frankford:

Comes he from Master Frankford, he is welcome;
So are his news, because they come from him.
(16.14-15)

Anne still considers that where Frankford lives is her home; the manor to which she is being sent will never be that. She constantly tells Nicholas that she cannot send a message to her husband as she is so unworthy, but wants him to tell Frankford what he has seen, something that Nicholas may not be able to do 'If I can for crying' (16.72).

When Anne Frankford leaves her marital home for the last time she describes what is ahead for her:

So, now unto my coach, then to my home,
So to my deathbed, for from this sad hour
I never will nor eat, nor drink, nor taste
Of any cates that may preserve my life.
I never will nor smile, nor sleep, nor rest,
But when my tears have washed my black soul white,
Sweet saviour, to thy hands I yield my sprite.
(16. 99-105)

For a contemporary audience these lines would have indicated that Anne was describing a conscious decision to end her life by her own hands, to commit suicide. In this patriarchal society, women had little control over much of their lives but this decision gives her control of the means and manner of her death. In early modern England taking this decision was not something to be contemplated lightly and warrants consideration of how this decision would have been considered at that date.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ For this account of suicide in early modern England I am indebted to Michael MacDonald and Terence R. Murphy's *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

The word 'suicide' was not widely used until the eighteenth century; instead the words used were 'self-murder' and 'self-homicide'.⁶⁸ Suicide was regarded as a terrible crime; it was an offence against God, against the king and against nature. Those who committed suicide were tried posthumously in a coroner's court and their heirs could be punished by the seizing of any movable goods, their homes, money and leases of their land could be forfeited to the crown. Most importantly, they were denied the rites and ceremonies associated with Christian burial. No clergy attended the burials and no prayers were said; instead the lay officials of a parish would take the corpse at night and bury it at a crossroads. The grave where the corpse was placed would sometimes be in a north-south direction rather than the east-west of a graveyard and the body buried face down. The body may have been desecrated by having a wooden stake driven through it; this was believed to prevent the body from rising on the Day of Judgement.

For the family of someone who committed suicide, in addition to trying to understand the reason or reasons for the suicide, they could not grieve in the rites usually associated with death. Apart from the religious ceremonies, these rites included the laying out of the corpse, the sitting with it during the night, the coffin carried in daylight by family and friends to the church and from there to the grave. Mourners wore black clothes symbolising their bereavement; burial was in church grounds or graveyard; flowers and garlands were placed by the graveside. Protestant clergy continued, as had their predecessors, to endorse the desecration of the body and to use sermons, tracts and other publications to denounce suicide as a grievous crime, contrary to divine law, that came either directly from God as retribution for a grievous sin or as temptation from Satan.

⁶⁸ R. A. Houston, *Punishing the Dead? Suicide, Lordship and Community in Early Britain 1500-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.23.

A coroner's court could bring in either of two verdicts: *felo de se* was a suicide determined to be sane, whilst those who were mad or in some way mentally incompetent were found to be *non compos mentis*. Anne Frankford's very deliberate decision to starve herself could be considered as *felo de se*, whereas the suicide of Ann Boote in William Sampson's *The Vow-Breaker*, following the suicide of her plight-troth groom and after childbirth, might be considered as *non compos mentis*. The laws against suicide were rigidly enforced in Tudor England for both financial and religious reasons. Reforms by Henry VII led to payment of the coroner from the forfeited estate of the deceased, and to the use of the Star Chamber to ensure the recovery of the goods of the deceased and their forfeiture to the crown. In the case of a married woman, this was not possible as her goods would have been in the legal possession of her husband. The family was the centre of English society whether rural or urban and in every class. For this reason marital breakdown was the most serious problem in society and marital problems ranked high among the motives which were attributed to suicide. It was believed that people killed themselves because their spouses did not love them, had been unfaithful, had died or had subjected them to violence.

There is some consolation for Anne in that at her death bed she is forgiven by her husband. This last scene echoes the first scene of the play as some of the same group who gathered to celebrate the marriage of the Frankford's are at Anne's deathbed. Anne begs forgiveness from Frankford and is forgiven by him for her 'rash offence' (17.105) and restores the names of both wife and mother to her. After her death, the play ends with Frankford talking of the epitaph he will have engraved on her tomb 'Here lies she whom her husband's kindness killed' (17.138).

These three women are the victims of tragedy in these plays all of which end with their deaths. The tragedy comes from their relationship with the principal male or males

in their lives and, as Keith Sturges describes, the disruption of normal family relationships. He comments that domestic drama reflects human frailty and that these passions are self-destructive.⁶⁹ It is this self-destructive nature that leads these women to become a guilty party to their own tragedy. At some point, consciously or otherwise, they make a decision which leads ultimately to their deaths.

Alice Arden makes a very conscious decision to murder her husband and uses everyone she encounters to achieve this. She is a clever, calculating woman; her twin passions are her love for Mosby and the murder of the man she is tied to by marriage. She subverts the roles within her marriage and gives away her wedding ring to her lover. In marriages at the end of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries it would be expected that the husband was the head of the household and the decision maker. Instead it is Alice who organises her fellow conspirators and plans the attempts on Arden's life; in these business arrangements, she is the equal of her husband.

Rachel Merry makes no decisions in her life; although innocent of the murders committed by her brother, she is an accessory. As a woman unable to plead benefit of clergy, she is condemned to death. She is not a strong character like Alice Arden. Instead she is swept along to inevitable death when the brother who is the centre of her life commits two murders. She has a narrow life in the tavern in Thames Street and is without the means to leave. Despite recognising the crime that her brother has committed, her steadfast loyalty to him leads her to helping him to cover up the murders. This loyalty to her brother, who owes her a duty of care as her only male relative but does not provide this, is her tragedy. She has no confidante or women friends to confide in and nowhere apart from her home, to go. She is failed by the one

⁶⁹ Keith Sturges, (ed.) *Three Elizabethan Domestic Tragedies* (London: Penguin Classics, 2012), pps.14 and 19.

person who should have done most to help her. Her guilty part in her own tragedy is to do nothing.

Anne Frankford, the seemingly ideal bride of the first scene, betrays her husband by committing adultery with Wendoll and subsequently starves herself to death. She is swept away by her confused emotions and feelings for Wendoll rather than setting out to commit adultery. Although a guilty party in her own tragedy, she is perhaps less guilty than Alice Arden. She carries on the affair in her own home under the eyes of her servants, which leads to the inevitable discovery by her husband. He literally kills her with kindness: he sends her away to one of his manors with everything she possesses, where she can live in comfort but without the most important things in her life, husband and children. In this exile, she cannot fulfil what was the traditional woman's role that of loving and loyal wife and mother to her children and Anne starves herself to death. This identity of wife and mother is lost by Anne, as she lives in exile in one of her husband's manors surrounded by her physical possessions. However, on her deathbed, the magnanimous Frankford restores the title of wife and mother to her.

Chapter 2

A Cunning Woman and a Witch

Anne Drury and Elizabeth Sawyer represent two different aspects of magic and witchcraft in which some people believed in early modern England. Anne Drury describes herself as a surgeon and as being gifted in reading people's futures; a cunning or wise woman. Elizabeth Sawyer physically resembles a witch and is treated as such by some of those who live in the village of Edmonton. An understanding of what was meant by both cunning and witchcraft and the differences between them is useful in providing a background against which to consider *A Warning for Fair Women* and *The Witch of Edmonton*. Cunning or wise men and women came from a tradition of people who were reputed to possess gifts, perhaps learnt from a parent or relative, in using herbs to cure rather than cause illness. They were more benign than witches and many had the ability to tell fortunes, find lost goods and practice divination.¹ In addition, some assisted women with conception and provided charms to women in labour. People wanting to consult them would often travel miles to do so and the advice most often sought was in relation to health and lost property.² Some of these wise or cunning folk also professed to be able to cure those who believed they were victims of witchcraft and to suggest or confirm the suspicions of the victim as to who may have been responsible for the bewitching.³

The plays are based on the lives of the real Anne Drury and the real Elizabeth Sawyer, both of whom were tried, convicted and executed for their crimes. Anne Drury and Elizabeth Sawyer were both the subjects of pamphlets written after their trials and

¹ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin, 1973), p. 210.

² Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study* (Oxford: Routledge, 1970), pps.121 and 129.

³ Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, p.125.

executions. Pamphlets and ballads were written by professional writers and published by commercial printers. The popularity of pamphlets was due in part to the increasing middle-class population.⁴ As the old feudal system declined the new middle-class merchants became wealthier and more powerful, Thomas Arden being an example of this new class which had both money and leisure. Pamphlets provided topicality, from war and crimes to sermons, plays and romances, the audience for the pamphlets according to Macfarlane was the 'sensation-loving London literary market'.⁵

The real Anne Drury is mentioned in a pamphlet by Arthur Golding published in 1573, *A Brief Discourse*, which related the events surrounding the murder of the London merchant, Master George Sanders, by the adventurer George Browne. Browne was the lover of Sanders' wife Anne and the murder was with her agreement and the assistance of Anne Drury and her servant Roger. It provides the fullest account of the circumstances surrounding the murder. The first mention of Anne Drury describes how she sent a letter to George Browne advising him of the movements of George Sanders, who was spending the night in Woolwich before going on foot to St. Mary Cray the next morning, when an opportunity to kill him would arise. According to Golding in his pamphlet, George Sanders did not know Browne. The next mention of Drury is that she provided money for Browne to help him in fleeing; first twenty pounds by pawning some plate which she owned and other plate belonging to Anne Sanders and a further six pounds the following day. It is not specifically clear in Golding if Browne's dealings were directly with Drury or through her man Trusty Roger. Following the arrest and confession of Browne, Drury and Roger were both arrested, charged with procuring the murder, and following it in aiding Browne. Subsequently, Anne Sanders was arrested and all four were found guilty and sentenced to death. Before this took

⁴ Joseph H. Marshburn and Alan R. Velie, *Blood and Knavery* (Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1973), p.12.

⁵ Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, p.81.

place, a former minister, Mell, who attended Anne Sanders in Newgate tried to persuade Anne Drury to take on herself all the guilt in return for money to assist in the marriage of her daughter. Drury agreed to this and did so in front of the Dean of St. Paul's. However, Anne Sanders asked Drury to continue to take on the guilt but Drury refused; she would not hazard her soul to save someone else. Anne Sanders then in her turn confessed her guilt to the Dean (of St. Paul's). At her execution, a large number of nobles gathered to watch and, in front of them, Drury confessed her guilt and also said that she neither murdered her late husband nor accused the wives of various merchants of unchaste living. She also denied that she had dealt in either witchcraft or sorcery. She specifically confessed to the Earl of Derby, in whose service she had been, that she was not the cause of the separation of him and his wife. Her servant, Trusty Roger, acknowledged his own guilt and the two were executed together.

There are also accounts of the murder of George Sanders by Stow and Holinshed. These are shorter than the pamphlet and, rather than containing details from any other authority, are abridged from the pamphlet. The author of *A Warning for Fair Women* may have used either a combination of all three or any one of them as the basis for the play. However, he does use artistic licence to make some changes in having his characters known to one another. In the play, Sanders may not have known Browne well, but he has certainly met him. The author of the play has the five protagonists, George and Anne Sanders, Anne Drury and Trusty Roger, and George Browne make their first entrance together. The five have just eaten supper together, where Browne has entertained the company with stories of his adventures. The acquaintance however is obviously recent as Sanders has to ask him 'I praie you whats your name?' (121).⁶ Anne Drury seems a regular and obviously entertaining and welcome guest in the

⁶ All references are to the edition edited by Charles Dale Cannon (The Hague: Mouton, 1975).

Sanders home as later in the play, on his return from the exchange, Sanders asks his wife what entertainment she has arranged for the evening:

And what good company?
None to sup with us? Send one for *Nan Drewry*,
Sheele play the wagge, tell tales, and make us merrie.
(408-410)

At the first meeting with Drury, Browne seems to have sensed that they share some common bond as he asks Roger for an opportunity to speak with her. Unlike the real Anne Drury, the Anne Drury of the play does use sorcery, although she is closer to the notion of the ‘cunning woman’ than to a witch. It is her talents for surgery and fortune telling which precipitate some of the actions in the play. She has a reputation for being able to cure illness, she assumes Browne has come to her for such a cure when he seeks her out and tells him ‘But if you have some secret maladie, / That craves my helpe, to use my surgerie’ (189-90). The surgery referred to by Drury is likely to have been treating illnesses or maladies with potions or tinctures such as those she refers to in the play. She may have been lucky in being able to identify those illnesses which may have resolved in time by themselves, but appearing to have cured them would have added to her reputation.⁷ The potions that Drury suggests to Browne, for any malady from which he may be suffering are *Aqua coelestis* and *Rosa solis* which ‘Will help a surfeit’ (199). *Aqua coelestis* was an elixir which could reputedly help against all manner of disease that might befall man and could cure diseases of the eye, colic, stinking breath, fevers and all offending evil humours.⁸ *Rosa solis* was made from the juice of the sundew plant, but consisted in the main of spirits (usually brandy) and spices.⁹ Dr.

⁷ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pps.246-47.

⁸ *A Short Discours Of the excellent Doctor and Knight maister Leonardo* (London: Thomas East, 1580).

⁹ Charles Dale Canon (ed.) *A Warning for Fair Women* p.180.

Steven's Water (the equivalent of aspirin) is also mentioned by Drury.¹⁰ This was what was known as a 'sovereign water', or superior elixir, this particular water was said to have been developed by Dr. Stevens, a physician of great knowledge and cunning who kept the recipe a secret until just before his death.¹¹ The main ingredient was a gallon of Gascon wine flavoured with spices and would help a number of conditions which ranged from palsy to helping women conceive, curing toothache and stone in the bladder.

When speaking of her gifts, Drury is perhaps a little disparaging of them, 'use my surgerie, / Which though I say't is preitie' (191). She uses these 'gifts' to persuade Browne of her ability to help him in his desire for Anne Sanders. She also wants Anne Sanders to believe in her good character, as she encourages her to seek out Browne. Drury is not as altruistic as she first appears, she tells Browne of Anne Sanders that she 'will not wrong her for a thousand pound' (232) yet a few lines later she accepts a ring from Browne and later 'ten angels of good gold' (507). In return, she suggests to Browne how he might first approach Anne Sanders. Despite her seeming eagerness to help Browne, she has no great opinion of him and says that he 'talkes and prates he knows not what' (427) but he 'hath a good store of coine' (446). Her belief in her own talents convinces her that she will bring about the conquest of Anne Sanders; her seeming friendship to the woman will help her in achieving her own aims:

And mistress Sanders she is yong and faire,
And may be tempred easily like waxe,
Especially by one that is familiar with her.
(447-49)

¹⁰ Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.21.

¹¹ John Partridge *The treasure of commodious conceits and hidden secrets* (Holbourne Bridge: Richard Jones, 1591).

Anne Drury says that for every disease she cures she tells a hundred fortunes a year and her house 'so haunted as it is, / With merchants wives, bachlers and young maides' (690-91). She is so convincing that Anne Sanders cannot understand Drury's knowledge of her conversation with George Browne 'Tis verie strange how ye should know so much' (742) other than that it must be either true or perhaps some magical arts are at work. She cannot contemplate that Anne Drury would have suggested to Browne the right moment to chance upon her:

Watch when her husband goes to the Exchange,
 Shee'l sit at doore: to her though she be strange,
 Spare not to speake, ye can but be denide
 (292-94)

Browne's accosting of Anne Sanders on her doorstep leads to seduction and eventually to murder. There is a contrasting doorstep wooing in Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*; Jane, wife of the journeyman Ralph Dampont, who is away fighting in France, is accosted by the disguised city gentleman Hammon who professes his love for her. Despite being uncertain of her husband's fate, Jane is very clear where her heart lies 'I have but one heart, and that heart's his due' (12.76).¹²

Whilst Anne Drury may have some gifts to warrant her being considered a cunning woman, she does possess another form of cunning; in this instance it is the deliberate underhand use of information.¹³ In the play the dramatist illustrates this by Drury's ability, when the occasion arises, to use whatever information or circumstances that come her way to her advantage and to the advancement of her reputation, but it is a disadvantage for her victim, Anne Sanders. Fortuitously for Drury she is actually with Anne Sanders when her husband refuses to pay for the millinery and drapery she has ordered; Sanders's business needs have priority. Drury fuels Anne's annoyance with

¹² Thomas Dekker, *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, Revels Plays, (eds.) R. L. Smallwood and Stanley Wells, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

¹³ *OED*, cunning (n) definition no. 5 (a).

her husband, first in refusing her money over his business needs, and secondly in wrongly sending a message by a third party, his servant who is but a boy:

Your husband was too blame, to say the troth,
That gave his servant such authoritie,
What signifies it but he doth repose
More trust in a wilde boy, than in his wife?
(660-63)

Drury suggests that Sanders has more respect for his servant than his own wife. It is Anne Sanders who provides an opportunity for Drury to read her palm as she tells Drury how she believes in 'signs', specifically that 'Sure I did know as wel when I did rise / This morning, that I should be chaft ere noone' (666-67). Questioned by Drury she says that these 'yellow spots upon my fingers' (670) mean that her feelings will be inflamed or excited that day. This suggests that she believes in signs and omens and would be susceptible to Anne Drury's suggestion. It allows Anne Drury to look at Anne Sanders' palm and she uses her opportunity to lead Anne to believe that her life is about to change and that a better fortune is promised for her:

I see disciphred,
Within this palme of yours, to quite that evil,
Faire signes of better fortune to ensue,
Cheere up your heart, you shortly shalbe free
From al your troubles. See you this character
Directly fixed to the line of life?
It signifies a dissolution,
You must be (*mistris Anne*) a widow shortly.
(675-82)

Anne Drury, as she tells Anne Sanders, can draw on her expertise:

More then in surgerie, though I do make
That my profession, this is my best living,
And where I cure one sicknesse or disease,
I tell a hundred fortunes in a yeere.
(686-89)

So Anne Sanders, who was merely angry with her husband, now seemingly has a troubled life and is considering how she will become a widow and find a second husband. This second husband is not only a gentleman, but a gallant with great estates and she declares 'If it be so, I must submit my selfe, / To that which God and destenie sets downe' (755-56). At this stage in the play she is prepared for events to take their course rather than have her husband murdered at her instigation.

Anne Drury's motive for her involvement in assisting Browne is greed; as Trusty Roger says 'Let them pay well for what you undertake' (458). Drury is equally clear about her plans for the money:

The money I will finger twixt them twaine
Shall make my daughter such a dowrie,
As I will match her better then with *Browne*,
To some rich Atturney, or Gentleman:
Let me alone, if they injoy their pleasure,
My sweete shalbe to feede upon their treasure.
(463-68)

She is prepared to take Browne's money but will find a husband of a better class for her daughter. Drury's success in influencing Anne Sanders is such that she is able to tell Browne that Anne Sanders is resolved on him for her second husband:

You neede not quaile for doubt of your reward,
You know already she is wonne to this,
What by my persuasion, and your owne suite,
That you may have her company when you will,
And she herselfe is thoroughly resolv'd,
None but *George Browne* must be her second husband.
(1094-99)

Drury is involved in the plot to kill Sanders from an early stage and sets Trusty Roger to follow Sanders and establish his movements so that Browne will have an opportunity to murder him. She also ensures that Browne pays Roger for his trouble:

Drury. Beshrew me, but he hath taken mighty paines,
Browne. *Roger*, come hither, there's for thee to drinke,
 And one day I will do thee greater good.
 (1147-49)

Following the murder of George Sanders, Drury tries to calm the agitated Anne Sanders, possibly because she may not trust Anne to be discreet. Just as the real Anne Drury did, in the play, Anne Drury obtains money for Browne, first twenty pounds for pawning plate belonging to herself and plate from Anne Sanders, and a further six pounds when Roger goes to Anne Sanders for a second time.

Anne Drury and Anne Sanders are arrested and accused of conspiring to bring about the death of George Sanders and later aiding Browne knowing that he is the murderer. Drury confesses her guilt and implicates Anne Sanders in the crime. The play does not have a scene where Anne Drury agrees to take all the guilt on herself; there is no clergyman asking her to do this. Instead what the author of the play does is to concentrate on writing a powerful scene between the two women with Anne Sanders in essence pleading for her life. Anne Sanders sends for Drury as she needs to know 'Whether *Nan Drurie* be resolved still / To cleare me of the murder as she promist,' (2564-65). This is something that Anne Drury cannot do now they are both near death, as she tells Anne Sanders:

Anne Sanders, Anne, tis time to turne the leafe,
 And leave dissembling, being so neere my death,
 The like I would advise your selfe to do.
 We have bin both notorious vile transgressors,
 And this is not the way to get remission,
 By joyning sinne to sinne, nor doth't agree
 With godly Christians, but with reprobates,
 And such as have no taste of any grace,
 And therefore (for my part) Ile cleere my conscience,
 And make the truth apparent to the world.
 (2578-87)

Drury acknowledges the sins that she has committed and will confess this. Just as with the real Anne Drury, she will not sacrifice her soul for the sake of another and says this very clearly when asked:

Anne Sanders. Will you prove then inconsistent to your friend?
Drury. Should I, to purchase safety for another,
Or lengthen out another's temporall life,
Hazard mine owne soule everlastingly,
And loose the endlesse joyes of heaven,
Preparde for such as wil confesse their sinnes?
No mistress *Sanders*, yet there's time of grace,
And yet we may obtaine forgiveness,
If we wil seeke it at our Saviours hands.
(2589-96)

Having confessed her sins, she now seeks repentance and finds forgiveness from her God. Now that death is near she is 'resolv'd to goe to death, / As if I were invited to a banquet.' (2637-38) and nothing will keep her from 'him that died for me, as neither fire, / Sword nor torment could retaine me from him.' (2640-41). Although she remains on stage, these are the last words Anne Drury speaks before her execution. Her public repentance does not include asking the various nobles present for forgiveness as did the real Anne Drury. Instead the focus of the scene is on the two women and there are no distractions with the introduction of either characters or events not previously referred to in the play. This is unlikely to have had much interest for the audience and there is little to be gained at this point in the play in providing information on her past not directly related to the murder of George Sanders. The author may have decided to concentrate on the relationship between the two of them.

Anne Drury is also represented in the play's dumb shows. The three dumb shows each introduced by Tragedy, divide the play into four. Dieter Mehl in *The Elizabethan Dumb Show* attempts to provide a definition of the dumb show and concludes that it is

best done by an analysis of the individual plays with dumb shows.¹⁴ He comments that in some plays it does have an important dramatic function in underlining the theme(s) of the play and its function often depends on the play's genre. The dumb show often included both mythological and allegorical figures with Time, Truth, Ambition and Chastity the most common of the latter. In *A Warning for Fair Women* he describes the dumb shows as 'mixed' as, at certain times where moral decisions are required in the lives of the characters, allegorical figures take over with a pantomime, which includes the characters from the play.¹⁵ There is also a practical use of the dumb show; it can illustrate events in a shorter period of time than that required in a number of scenes; telling as opposed to showing. B. R. Pearn says that the use of the characters from the play in a dumb show has three functions: as a prologue to the whole play, as a means of bringing characters from the previous scene back on stage or as a silent form of a scene.¹⁶

The first dumb show takes place after Anne Drury has told Anne Sanders' fortune and she is shown thrusting away Chastity; later she and Roger embrace. Tragedy's speech is clear in where the blame for Anne Sanders seduction and murder of her husband lie:

Next, lawlesse Lust conducteth cruell *Browne*,
 He doth seduce this poore deluded soule,
 Attended by unspotted Innocence,
 As yet unguiltie of her husbands death.
 Next followes on that instrument of hell
 That wicked *Drurie*, the accursed fiend,
 That thrusts her forward to destruction,
 And last of al is *Roger*, *Druries* man,
 A villaine expert in all trecherie,
 One conversant in all her damned drifts,
 And a base broker in this murderous act.
(819-29)

¹⁴ Dieter Mehl, *The Elizabethan Dumb Show: The History of a Dramatic Convention* (London: Methuen, 1965), p.xi.

¹⁵ Mehl, *The Elizabethan Dumb Show*, p.21.

¹⁶ B. R. Pearn, 'Dumb-show in Elizabethan Drama' *RES* 43 (1935), p.401.

The dumb show is less sympathetic to Anne Sanders than in the main action of the play; she is a 'deluded soule' (820). Having the chorus portray something which is different from the action in the play, as in *A Warning for Fair Women*, is a device used by Shakespeare in *Henry V* for the same company. In *Henry V* the action immediately following the Chorus at the beginning of each act is the opposite of that just described. The Chorus at the beginning of Act 2 refers to 'the youth of England' (2.0.1) but the characters that make their entrance are the complete antithesis of this; Nym and Bardolph¹⁷. In saying in the dumb show that Anne Sanders is not yet guilty of her husband's murder, this suggests to the audience this will change. Anne Drury is not just a cunning woman or wise woman but is an instrument of devil and is ably supported in her treachery by Trusty Roger. It refers to Anne Drury as a witch 'for thou didst lay the plot, / And thou didst worke this damned witch devise' (856-57).

In Dumb Show II it is again Tragedy who speaks, Drury is described as 'false *Druries*' (1253) in having made known Sanders' plans to Browne. To music, Browne, Roger, Anne Sanders and Anne Drury act out a symbolic murder of George Sanders, encouraged by Lust. Lust offers an axe to Anne Sanders who refuses to chop down the great tree (symbolising Sanders), Drury offers to help but she continues to refuse. Lust encourages and whispers with Browne, Roger and Anne Drury and is described by Tragedy as '*Lust* leades together this adulterous route' (1282). For her part, Tragedy calls Anne Drury 'this damned woman' (1291). In Dumb Show III, Anne Sanders, Anne Drury and Roger are shown the body of George Sanders and all seem very sorrowful (1801).

This dumb show portrayal is of a darker character than the Anne Drury of the play. Instead of the friendly, entertaining social neighbour with a side line in elixirs and

¹⁷ William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, (ed.) Andrew Gurr New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

palmistry, she is a woman who acts as a panderer in the seduction of Anne Sanders. A more intimate relationship than that of mistress and servant (which might be implied in the play) is shown between herself and Trusty Roger and her motives are lust rather than greed. There is also the suggestion that she is a witch. It is not possible now, over three hundred years since the play was first performed, to establish if the lines spoken by the allegorical figures were before or at the same time as the dumb show. Unless they were doubling as the allegorical figures, the actors playing the roles in the play could have played the roles in the dumb show based on their exit before it and their next entrance. If they did play the roles, it would have added a layer of meaning not shown in the play with Anne Drury described as a witch, dealing in the black arts, and is also in a sexual relationship with her servant.

Anne Drury is a guilty party in her own tragedy. A character who is similar in some ways to Alice Arden, she is driven by greed and manipulates those around her for her own gains just as Alice does. She also plays a number of roles: the entertaining neighbour invited into his home by George Sanders, the false friend to Anne Sanders, and a procuress as she plots the seduction of Anne Sanders with George Browne.

It is the story of Elizabeth Sawyer, accused of witchcraft by the villagers of Edmonton, which is the basis of one of the plots in *The Witch of Edmonton*; the second plot, linked to the first tenuously, is that of Frank Thorney, his bigamous marriage and his subsequent murder of his second wife. Witchcraft is the use of magic, that is using forces, mysterious or supernatural, to make things happen. The power to do this was believed to be from an external force, the Devil for example.¹⁸ George Gifford defines a witch as ‘one that woorketh by the Devill, or by some devilish or curious art, either

¹⁸ Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, p.4.

hurting or healing'.¹⁹ Witches could cast spells and conjure up familiars, who could mysteriously injure people; this damage was known as *maleficium*. Witchcraft encompassed a broad spectrum from murder or attempted murder, cursing, fortune telling, to looking for lost goods, both causing and healing illness, and the provision of love philtres. A common perception of the witch was that of an old woman, widowed or single, lower class, living in or on the borders of poverty and possibly having a facial deformity or disfigurement. More women than men were accused and tried for witchcraft.²⁰

Witchcraft was often used in the early modern period to explain away what was, at that time, seemingly unexplainable. In the natural and human world, this included failed harvests or blighted crops and the maiming of animals. In people, it might take the form of someone who appeared to be healthy, being suddenly struck down with fits, sudden illness and death, most of which could now be attributed to epilepsy, cancer or aneurysm. The witch was usually someone local and often known to the victim, who could be blamed for these seemingly inexplicable events. A witch's accusers were, in the majority of cases, someone who lived near to them, possibly a neighbour.²¹ Keith Thomas comments that the witch was usually already in some sort of social relationship with the victim before she practised her malice on them.²²

Although many people had an awareness of witches and witchcraft, it was often only when something unexpected occurred, sudden illness for example, that witchcraft was suspected and an accusation made. Someone who believed themselves or one of their own family to have been the victim of witchcraft might recall refusing wood, milk

¹⁹ George Gifford, *A discourse of the subtile practises of devilles by witches and sorcerers* (London: Toby Cooke, 1578).

²⁰ Marianne Hester, *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991), p.198.

²¹ Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* p.168.

²² Keith Thomas, 'The Relevance of Social Anthropology to the Historical Study of English Witchcraft' in *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), p.59.

or food to the perpetrator. England was in a process of change and this included village life where the previous structures in place for the care of the less well-off no longer existed following the Reformation. It now rested on the charity of one's neighbours. When someone refused charity to their neighbours, there was often awareness on their part of having given offence in failing to discharge what was now a social obligation. In periods of social crisis, for example the Reformation, it was not unknown for villages to single out and exclude or treat as a scapegoat someone who was deviant.²³ Anger at being denied neighbourly help was, according to Alan Macfarlane, often the dominant motive for denouncing someone as a witch.²⁴ Shakespeare provides an example of such a refusal in *Macbeth*, when the First Witch recounts the refusal of the sailor's wife to give her chestnuts, and whose refusal is 'Aroynt thee, witch!' (1.3.6). The First Witch outlines her plans for revenge on the sailor's wife and will be assisted in this by the other two witches.²⁵ Accusations of witchcraft could come as a result of a quarrel, for example, over the sale of food; Diane Purkiss recounts an incident where one woman accused another of overcharging her for some cherries. As a result of the quarrel the woman who sold the cherries fell ill and believed herself to have been a victim of witchcraft.²⁶ Thomas suggests that sometimes the victim's own guilty conscience was enough to provide an accusation of witchcraft.²⁷

Given the accusations against Elizabeth Sawyer, it is perhaps useful to consider the legal status of witchcraft at this date. The first English statute for punishment of witchcraft was passed under Henry VIII (33 Hen. VIII, cap. 8 1542) followed by a new act in 1563 (5 Eliz. 1, cap.16) and a third more severe act in 1604 under James I (2 Jac.

²³ Julia M. Garrett 'Dramatizing Deviance: Sociological Theory and *The Witch of Edmonton*', *Criticism* 49 (2007), p.338.

²⁴ Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* p.173.

²⁵ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (ed.) Kenneth Muir (London: Methuen, 1951).

²⁶ Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.96.

²⁷ Thomas, 'The Relevance of Social Anthropology', p.69.

1, cap.12). Under the 1542 and 1563 acts, using witchcraft to cause death was punishable by imprisonment for one year and death for a second offence. The more severe act of 1604 extended the application of the capital penalty.²⁸

The real Elizabeth Sawyer was the subject of a pamphlet written by Henry Goodcole. He was a chaplain who attended the prisoners in Newgate Gaol who had been sentenced to death and accompanied them to their execution. The pamphlet bears the title *The wonderfull discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch late of Edmonton, her conviction and death*. Goodcole begins with an apology to his Christian readers for actually writing the pamphlet which he suggests was against his will. However, he wanted to correct some of the 'base and false ballades' sung at the time of the execution.²⁹ Goodcole provided details of the trial, the conversation he had with her between her sentencing and death, and as he attended her to her execution.

In his description of the trial, Goodcole wanted to give his readers a picture of Elizabeth Sawyer which would satisfy their curiosity as to what a witch looked like but also possibly confirm any preconceptions as to the appearance of a witch. Sawyer is not just described as looking pale but 'ghost like', with a crooked and deformed body. Her cursing, swearing and blaspheming allowed the devil to initially have access to her. Her motive for her deeds was that her neighbours would not buy brooms from her. Local people were suspicious of her and on 14th April 1621 Elizabeth Sawyer was arraigned on three charges of witching to death their children at nurse and the cattle of her neighbours. With malice aforethought and with diabolical help, she witched unto death her neighbour Agnes Ratcliffe who had struck Sawyer's sow after it licked some soap belonging to her. Sawyer then threatened her and that evening Agnes Ratcliffe fell sick and died four days later. On her deathbed, in the presence of witnesses,

²⁸ Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, p.15.

²⁹ *The Witch of Edmonton*, (eds.) Corbin and Sedge, p.136.

including her husband, Agnes said that if she died at this time that Elizabeth Sawyer was the cause of her death which was procured by witchcraft. Sawyer was sentenced to death on 17th April 1621 and executed two days later. The pamphlet was entered in the Stationers Register on 27th April 1621 and the play was performed at Court on 29th December 1621.

During the few lines of introduction to the questioning, Goodcole says that he had to take a particular line of questioning as she ‘was a very ignorant woman’.³⁰ He does lead her in questioning, for example he asks her what she said to the Devil when he came to her, rather than asking what the Devil said to her. His style of questions and ultimate aim was to confirm her guilt. He asks her how many deaths she caused as opposed to asking her if she was the cause of any deaths. She told Goodcole in what circumstances the Devil first came to her when she was cursing, swearing and blaspheming. He came in the form of a dog and was sometimes black and sometimes white; she called him Tom.

It is possible that for some of these old, lonely and marginalised women, a reputation as a witch gave them a degree of power over their neighbours and a standing which they did not have, as in Elizabeth Sawyer’s case, living in poverty in Edmonton. Perhaps this was preferable to being ignored by their neighbours. Keith Thomas provides a number of examples of such women, including that of Anne Ellis whose neighbours overpaid her for the stockings she knitted because of the fear of her witchcraft.³¹ Purkiss comments that in being accused of witchcraft, your own identity was replaced with one that was not of your choosing. Some women did take on the identity suggested to them.³² In the play *The Witch of Edmonton* this is what the villagers of Edmonton do to Elizabeth Sawyer: she is assigned the role of witch and

³⁰ *The Witch of Edmonton*, (eds.) Corbin and Sedge, p.141.

³¹ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.675.

³² Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, p.145.

curses her affluent neighbours. The role of witch becomes her identity. This new identity gives her a sense of power which she did not have as an old hag gathering sticks in Edmonton. In the dog, Tom, she has someone to love, who will do her bidding (to a degree) and report back to her. In taking on this new identity, another identity comes with it, that of victim; for Sawyer it can only be a matter of time before she is accused of witchcraft, arraigned, tried, condemned and executed.

Given that the play's title is *The Witch of Edmonton* it would seem reasonable that the eponymous witch would make her entrance in the play at an early point, but Elizabeth Sawyer only appears at the beginning of Act 2. The authors of the play may either be making a point about her social isolation from the villagers by introducing her almost as an afterthought, or using this as a theatrical device to heighten the anticipation of the audience. Act 1 introduces the various social classes from gentry to Morris dancers, gentlemen and yeomen, servants and countrymen. To make Sawyer even more isolated, the authors make no reference to her either having or having had a husband or children. In Goodcole's pamphlet, although her husband and children are mentioned in it, he does refer to her at the start of the declaration as a spinster.³³ It is possible that he may mean that she was not married at the time of her trial, but was a woman living on her own as the use of the word spinster to designate an unmarried woman was not in common usage until later in the seventeenth century.³⁴

To illustrate her social isolation at her entrance in Act 2 Scene 1, Elizabeth Sawyer enters alone gathering sticks. This says two things, first that there is no-one else to do this for her and secondly that her neighbours do not extend any charity to her by giving her sticks for her fire. This may be the authors' method of presenting a sympathetic character to their audience who may come to view her as a victim during the course of

³³ *The Witch of Edmonton* (eds.) Corbin and Sedge, p.141.

³⁴ *OED*, spinster (n) definition 2(a).

the play. As Julia M. Garrett comments, they are focusing not on her crimes but on the social isolation and abuse towards her which is the basis for her subsequent actions.³⁵

Not all elderly, impoverished women were witches, but the authors of *The Witch of Edmonton* choose to represent on stage the archetypal picture of the witch in Elizabeth Sawyer. Lest the audience are in any doubt Elizabeth Sawyer describes her deformities at her entrance in Act 2 Scene. Her deformities aside, she questions why the villagers treat her as they do:

And why on me? Why should the envious world
Throw all their scandalous malice upon me?
'Cause I am poor, deformed and ignorant,
And like a bow buckled and bent together
By some more strong in mischiefs than myself,
Must I for that be made a common sink
For all the filth and rubbish of men's tongues
To fall and run into?

(2.1.1-8)³⁶

In Edmonton the wrongs of all are blamed on her:

Some call me witch,
And, being ignorant of myself, they go
About to teach me how to be one, urging
That my bad tongue, by their bad usage made so,
Forspeaks their cattle, doth bewitch their corn,
Themselves, their servants and their babes at nurse.
This they enforce upon me, and in part
Make me to credit it.

(2.1.8-15)

The important word in these lines is 'teach'. For Elizabeth Sawyer, ignorant of witchcraft, it is her treatment by her neighbours that has taught her to behave as a witch.³⁷ Teaching is about guiding or directing so as to gain knowledge but here it is in a negative rather than a positive sense. Instead 'bad usage' has taught her that she

³⁵ Garrett 'Dramatizing Deviance', p.328.

³⁶ All references are to the Oxford English Drama edition, edited by Martin Wiggins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) pps.129-97.

³⁷ *OED*, teach (v) definitions 3(a) and 6(a).

should act like someone who is feared and shunned by their neighbours and to possibly to seek revenge. That treatment is illustrated at the entry a few lines later of Old Banks who following her curses, strikes the woman, calling her 'witch' (2.1.17) and 'hag' (2.1.26).

Witches were believed to have the power of cursing, that is the power to cause a person physical harm by speaking hostile words. Popular belief was in the efficacy of cursing and according to Thomas it was this which often led to a charge of witchcraft. Curses by the poor known as 'the Beggar's curse', were believed to be the most effective, particularly if justified.³⁸ In the play, Elizabeth Sawyer's response to her treatment by Old Banks is to curse him, she warns him that if he strikes her, the sticks she is gathering will 'struck 'cross thy throat, thy bowels, thy maw, thy midriff' (2.1.24-25) and:

Dost strike me, slave? Curmudgeon, now thy bones aches,
thy joints cramps, and convulsions stretch and crack thy sinews.
(2.1.27-29)

When he does strike her, she curses him: 'withered may that hand and arm / Whose blows have lamed me, drop from the rotten trunk' (2.1.31-32).

In his questioning of the real Elizabeth Sawyer, Goodcole had asked her how she came to have only one eye. His reason for asking the question was that both her parents had only one eye each. Sawyer told him that she did have two eyes until the night her mother died. One of Sawyer's own children had left a stick by the dying woman's bed and Sawyer had been struck in the eye by the stick when she bent down. There is only one reference in the play to her having one eye. After the entrance of Cuddy Banks and the dancers, the First Dancer says 'Bless us, Cuddy, and let her curse her tother eye out' (2.1.86-87) implying that she has only one eye. The authors of the

³⁸ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.604.

play make no reference to its being the result of an accident and leave its origin to the imagination of the audience who might assume that, in addition to her other deformities, she was born with only one eye, which in their minds could mean that despite her denials, she is a witch.

Having taught her how to be a witch, the villagers of Edmonton treat her as one:

I am shunned
And hated like a sickness, made a scorn
To all degrees and sexes.
(2.1.98-100)

This negative aspect of teaching is not unique to *The Witch of Edmonton*; Shakespeare uses it in *The Merchant of Venice*. In his impassioned speech in Act 3 Scene 1, Shylock describes how Antonio has disgraced him (3.1.51); the example of the Christians in the play has taught him one thing:

If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by
Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you
teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will
better the instruction.
(3.1.65-69)³⁹

Elizabeth Sawyer echoes Shylock's sentiments as she wants revenge:

Would some power, good or bad,
Instruct me which way I might be revenged
Upon this churl.
(2.1.105-7)

This is Elizabeth's second reference to teaching and learning. The villagers have taught her how she should behave and she seeks instruction as to how she might seek revenge, after all 'Tis all one / To be a witch as to be counted one' (2.1.116-17). Her curse on Old Banks, 'this black cur' (2.1.114) leads to the arrival of Dog (who is black in the

³⁹ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, (ed.) Jay L Halio, Oxford World Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

early scenes of the play) to claim her as his own. For a contemporary audience this might have confirmed the power believed to be attached to a witch's curses. But there is one request from Elizabeth that the Dog cannot fulfil: to take Old Banks' life, but he will 'work on his corn and cattle' (2.1.171). The Dog confirms Elizabeth's new identity by calling her 'witch of Edmonton' (2.1.172).

Elizabeth then sets out to behave just as witches were believed to behave, bewitching Cuddy Banks, causing illness to Old Banks' horse and other cattle, bewitching the wife and the serving man of the First Countryman. Sawyer's treatment of Cuddy Banks is perhaps more mischief than malice as she 'must dissemble, the better to accomplish my revenge' (2.1.214-15). It is he who approaches her as he is in love with Katherine Carter and 'That same party has bewitched me' (2.1.223). The use of the word 'bewitched' is interesting. It is acceptable for Cuddy Banks to use this word to describe the magical effect that Katherine Carter has had on him but for Elizabeth Sawyer to bewitch someone leads to accusations of witchcraft. His approach to Elizabeth Sawyer is to flatter her - 'you are a motherly woman' (2.1.205) - and to offer her money. His reason for seeking her help may be that he regards her more as a cunning or wise woman who was believed to help those in love. Sawyer is equally flattering in her turn as she tells him, 'You seem a good young man' (2.1.214). Although she does plan to have some degree of revenge for his father's treatment of her, she does moderate this by deciding to 'have sport' (2.1.230). Her instructions to him are fairly mild: 'Turn to the west, and whatsoe'er thou hearest or seest, stand silent and be not afraid' (2.1.240-42). To win Katherine Carter he needs to go to the stile that she frequents and follow the first thing he sees, once he embraces her, she will be his. Sawyer and possibly the Dog, conjure up a spirit in Katherine's likeness. This spirit is the first thing he sees and on following her he gets a ducking in the pond but does not

come to any other harm. This ducking in the pond would have reminded the audience of one of the methods often used to establish if a person accused of witchcraft was a witch by placing them on a ducking stool and ducking them in a pond. The play's authors play on this and it is the woman who is believed to be a witch who uses the water ordeal on one of her tormentors, perhaps another indication of Elizabeth's intelligence.

The suspicions of the villagers as to her being a witch are aroused and they seek to try and find out if Elizabeth is a witch by setting fire to the thatch from 'a hovel of hers' (4.1.17). It was a common belief if this was done, that the witch would then appear. If a person who believed that they were a victim scratched the witch and drew blood this could end his illness or bewitching.⁴⁰ When questioned by the Justice, Elizabeth denies that she is a witch but her daily treatment by the villagers has forced her to adopt witchcraft as her only means of revenge as she tells the Justice when questioned by him:

I am none. None but base curs so bark at me. I am none. Or would
I were! If every poor old woman be trod on thus by slaves, reviled,
kicked, beaten, as I am daily, she, to be revenged, had need turn witch.

(4.1.76-9)

In this characterisation of an intelligent woman, Sawyer uses the third person to describe what has happened to her; becoming a witch is the only way to be revenged on the villagers for their daily treatment of her. The authors use Sawyer to make a social comment on the treatment by some of elderly, solitary women. Sawyer considers herself to be of so little worth that she continues to refer to herself in the third person:

Now an old woman
Ill-favoured grown with years, if she be poor
Must be called bawd or witch.

(4.1.122-4)

⁴⁰ Thomas, 'The Relevance of Social Anthropology', p.57.

Elizabeth Sawyer makes an indirect comment on the behaviour of Sir Arthur and his seduction of Winifred. She refers to the actions of a cunning woman and says that she never:

tempted maiden,
With golden hooks flung at her chastity,
To come and lose her honour, and, being lost,
To pay not a denier for't?
(4.1.140-43)

Sir Arthur's response to this is that he knows 'now she's a witch' (4.1.147).

Elizabeth seeks revenge on Anne Ratcliffe who had struck and lamed Elizabeth's sow when he licked some soap, by having the Dog touch the woman resulting in her madness:

O, my ribs are made of a paned hose, and they break.
There's a Lancashire hornpipe in my throat. Hark, how it
tickles it, with doodle, doodle, doodle, doodle! Welcome,
sergeants! Welcome, devil! Hands, hands, hold hands and dance
around, around, around.
(4.1.190-94)

But despite what either Elizabeth or the Dog does, nothing changes the treatment of Elizabeth. She is not only called witch but is herself 'bewitched from doing harm' (5.1.3) although she does come to believe that 'Revenge to me is sweeter far than life' (5.1.7).

In the last act of the play, Elizabeth again makes another solitary entrance still questioning:

Still wronged by every slave, and not a dog
Bark in his dame's defence? I am called witch,
Yet am myself bewitched from doing harm.
Have I given up myself to thy black lust
Thus to be scorned?
(5.1.1-5)

Once Dog has left her, Elizabeth's fate is sealed and she is arrested and sent to execution. Even as she is led away to execution, she is accused of additional crimes; Old Carter accuses her of bewitching Frank Thorney to kill his daughter Susan who is Frank's bigamous wife. He also says that Gammer Washbowl's sow cast her pigs the day before she would have farrowed. The authors of the play did not include the accusation made against the real Elizabeth Sawyer of witching to death children; instead she is accused of sending Anne Ratcliffe mad. Elizabeth tells them that she had intended to repent but even now she is being accused, although she cannot pray, her conscience is settled in her own way:

I would live longer if I might, yet since
I cannot, pray torment me not, my conscience
Is settled as it shall be.

(5.3.43-45)

As she goes to her execution she is still abusing those around her; this time her curses are for not being allowed to say her prayers 'Have I scarce breath enough to say my prayers, / And would you force me to spend that in bawling' (5.3.48-49).

Anne Drury is an intelligent woman. As she tells Trusty Roger she is no fool (462; she is responsible for her own fate. In some ways she is similar to Alice Arden in *Arden of Faversham* both in her determination to get what she wants and in her 'business' as a cunning woman with many clients. In common with Alice Arden, it is Drury's greed for money and her ambition for her daughter that leads to her involvement in Browne's plans to win Anne Sanders, even though that leads to the murder of George Sanders. Anne Sanders is a pawn in Drury's overall plans rather than simply being used out of any malice. There is no suggestion that Anne Sanders has ever injured Anne Drury at any time. In the end, Drury is a victim of her own greed

and ambition and it is this that is responsible for her subsequent decisions and to being a guilty party to her tragedy.

Elizabeth Sawyer is a victim of her poverty and class as she lives in social isolation in Edmonton. Taught to be a witch by the villagers of Edmonton, she takes on this identity of witch which, in addition to revenge on her accusers and tormentors, gives her a degree of power and status which she does not have. Their bad usage of her continues and it is inevitable that ultimately the accusations of witchcraft lead to her death. It is in taking on this identity of witch, which brings with it the identity of victim, that she becomes a victim of tragedy of her own making. In the early seventeenth century, many women who were physically deformed were on occasions believed to be witches by their neighbours. It was only a matter of time before public accusations of witchcraft against some of them would start. In common with Anne Frankford, Elizabeth Sawyer loses her own identity and has another chosen for her. Without other options, Elizabeth develops the role so much so that she begins to use it for revenge on her fellow villagers. It is this choice that she makes that leads to her tragedy and her own part in it. The Elizabeth Sawyer in *The Witch of Edmonton*, is perhaps a more intelligent woman than many of those accused of witchcraft. This characterisation of her may have been a conscious choice by the authors of the play, that women such as her, poor, lonely and vulnerable could be intelligent and should not become the victims of their neighbours' malice.

Chapter 3

A Wife and No Wife

This chapter will consider three plays against the background of a prior contract (plight troth) or clandestine marriage and the consequences of a second, perhaps enforced, marriage. One of the implications of the plight troth was that if the man contracted a second marriage, both women faced uncertainty as to what position they occupied. The plays and characters to be considered are *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* and *The Vow-Breaker* and the Wife, Clare Harcop and Ann Boote respectively. As *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* is also concerned with wardship this will be discussed in the context of the degree of enforced marriage associated with it.

To appreciate the implications of a prior contract, it is useful to consider what constituted a legal marriage in Early Modern England. Until the introduction of the Hardwicke Marriage Act in 1753 (26 Geo II cap.32), marriage was unregulated and depending on circumstances, it was sometimes difficult to prove that it had actually taken place. The format of marriage came from the canon law on the formation of marriage by Pope Alexander III in the late twelfth century.¹ Although most Catholic countries changed these by a decree of the Council of Trent in 1563, the older laws remained in England until the middle of the eighteenth century. There were two forms of words, firstly *per verba de praesenti* (present consent) as in ‘I take thee as wife / husband’, when freely given by a man and woman capable of marriage, made a valid marriage. This could not be dissolved during the joint lifetime of the two parties. Secondly, *per verba de futuro* (future consent) where the words used were ‘I promise to

¹My account of the situation before the Hardwicke Marriage Act is indebted to Charles Donahue, Jr., ‘The Canon Law the Formation of Marriage and Social Practice in the Later Middle Ages’, *Journal of Family History* 8 (1983), pps.144-158.

take thee as wife / husband'. When the marriage had been consummated or any other condition fulfilled, for example the payment of a dowry, then it became *per verba de praesenti* and was a valid and indissoluble marriage. The minimum age of consent for present consent was fourteen years for the man and twelve years for the woman, for future consent both parties needed to be over seven years. Provided that neither party was already be married to someone who was still living, nor had taken a vow of chastity or were related within the laws of consanguinity, they could marry. Consent was not essential from parents or guardians for the marriage to be valid, as David Cressy comments that for a marriage to be valid the consent of parent or guardian was 'neither arbitrary nor essential' and parents were often swayed by their children. A formal ceremony was not required, neither was the presence of any witnesses.² This lack of witnesses could lead to some uncertainty as to whether a couple regarded themselves as being married. It could possibly lead to difficulties at a future date in establishing if a marriage had in fact taken place, particularly if there was a denial by either party that such a promise had been given. Although, according to R. B. Outhwaite, the number of cases involving bigamy is difficult to establish.³

A church ceremony was viewed by some as being either expensive or unnecessary.⁴ A couple might exchange a private promise to marry and then declare it before family, friends or other witnesses – to plight their troth – and for some this was followed by a religious ceremony but not always.⁵ Laura Gowing comments that the words a couple spoke often reflected those of the marriage service such as speaking their vows in turn with the man speaking first. Afterwards the couple drank one another's health and

² David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage & Death*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.256

³ R. B. Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage in England 1500-1800*, (London & Rio Grande: Hambledon Press, 1995), p.56.

⁴ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, (London: Penguin, 1982), p.29.

⁵ Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage in England 1500-1800*, p.xx.

broke a piece of gold into two pieces to seal their contract.⁶ The couple would each keep a piece and when the pieces were brought together then they were one. Cressy points out that most people did accept at this date that private ceremonies were deficient (even if they were conducted by a degree of formality) so they were often followed by solemnisation in church.⁷ The term clandestine marriage was used to describe a marriage which, in the early seventeenth century, was valid legally in terms of inheritance and dowry but did not satisfy canon law since it was conducted without banns, any public announcement or solemnisation in church.⁸

The negotiations for marriage began with discussions between families, the respective fathers or guardians were there to facilitate the marriage rather than impose their will.⁹ Parents arranging marriages for their children considered not only their own financial interests but also those of the family of any potential spouse. On the stage, liberties could be taken for the sake of plot, with parents or guardians stopping the progress of true love or forcing another marriage on their children, with fathers or other guardians being portrayed as either comic bumbler or bullies.¹⁰

A Yorkshire Tragedy and *The Miserie of Enforced Marriage* both have as their source the pamphlet *Two Most Unnaturall and Bloodie Murthers* which described the murders committed by Walter Calverley and was entered in to the Stationers' Register on 12th June 1605.¹¹ Walter Calverley from Yorkshire murdered two of his children on 23rd April 1605 and was pressed to death on 5th August 1605 in York; the reason for

⁶ Laura Gowing *Domestic Dangers, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 143.

⁷ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage & Death*, pps. 317-18.

⁸ Ann Barton, *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.25.

⁹ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage & Death* (1997), p.254.

¹⁰ Ann Jennalie Cook, *Making a Match: Courtship in Shakespeare and his Society* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1991,) p.79.

¹¹ A. C. Cawley and Barry Gaines (eds.) *A Yorkshire Tragedy, Revels Plays*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), Introduction p.1

this method of execution was that he did not enter a plea.¹² Calverley had been left seven or eight hundred pounds a year following the death of his father, and was the ward of a 'noble and worthy gentleman'.¹³ He married, perhaps by an exchange of future promise, the daughter of a gentleman in whose home he was a guest and they waited for a suitable time to solemnise their marriage. However, he then travelled to London and exchanged more formal vows with a relation of his guardian. When news of this second marriage reached his first wife, she fell into a decline or consumption. Calverley began to lead a life given to vice and an excess of spending resulting in the mortgaging of his lands. In increasing need of more money he sold his second wife's rings and jewels and she travelled to London to seek out her uncle's help. Her uncle confirmed that he would obtain a position at court for Calverley and would protect him from his creditors. This was not to Calverley's satisfaction as what he wanted was money and he believed that this was a trick by his second wife to keep her dowry.

The pamphlet describes the remorse bordering on madness which Calverley suffered when he finally recognised the ruin that he had brought on his family and in his torment he murdered his two eldest children, inflicted wounds upon his second wife (mother of the children) and caused the death of their nursemaid. Leaving to murder his youngest son who was with a wet nurse, he was finally overtaken and committed to jail in Wakefield. On the journey to Wakefield prison he asked to speak with his second wife as they passed Calverley Hall, a request that was granted. He took an emotional farewell of his wife, the bodies of the murdered children lying at the threshold of the house. In prison he lamented for one child all day and the other all night.

¹² Edward Garnett, *The Story of The Calverley Murders, 23rd April 1605 (Prelude, Deed and Sequel: A Yorkshire Tragedy "Not So New as Lamentable and True"* (Leeds: Margaret Fenton, 1991), p.39.

¹³ *Two Unnatural Murders 1605 in Three Elizabethan Domestic Tragedies* (ed.) Keith Sturgess (London: Penguin Classics, 2012), pps.303-16.

A Yorkshire Tragedy has ten scenes and the first of these is very different in style from the other nine. In Scenes 2-10 characters are named by their relationship to one another, the Wife and the Husband, rather than by a given name. The first scene has two named serving men, Oliver and Ralph, neither of whom appears in later scenes, discussing their master and mistress. Their mistress is unhappy with her husband's long absence from home. They are joined by a third servant, Sam, who has travelled to London with his master and dismisses his mistress as both a fool and ninny-hammer (1.34) as her husband is 'married to another long ago' (1.37).¹⁴ Sam expands on this with, 'Why, did you not know that till now? Why, he's married, beats his wife, and has two or three children by her' (1.39-40).

Already his master has pawned his lands and his younger brother has had to stand surety for him (1.49-50). The servants are aware of their master referring to his second wife as 'whore' and his children as 'bastards' (1.53-55). That the husband has contracted two marriages is not referred to specifically again in the remaining scenes. The closest reference is in a later scene when the Husband does say of the Wife 'for fashion sake I married' (2.74) and refers to her children as bastards (2.77) without offering any explanation other than his despair at his financial situation. Keith Sturges says that it can reasonably be assumed that this first scene is actually a later addition and was not part of the original play.¹⁵

Discounting the first scene and looking at Scene 2, from the first lines it is clear that there are difficulties in the marriage and a breakdown in the relationship of husband and wife. The scene introduces the Wife and the increasing financial problems which will lead ultimately to her husband's murder of two of his children. The Wife's despair is evident as she asks at her entrance 'What will become of us?' (2.1), words which

¹⁴ All quotations are from the Revels Plays edition edited by A. C. Cawley and Barry Gaines (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986).

¹⁵ Keith Sturges ed. *A Yorkshire Tragedy* in *Three Elizabeth Domestic Tragedies*, Introduction, p.34.

echo those of Elizabeth Sawyer at her first entrance in *The Witch of Edmonton*. As she continues her soliloquy it is clear that the Husband leads a life of excess more suited to a bachelor than a married man with ‘Dice, and voluptuous meetings, midnight revels’ (2.7). This has reached a point where ‘His fortunes cannot answer his expense’ (2.14) and he has not fulfilled his youthful promise (2.6). Although his physical appearance ‘frights my heart’ (2.17) and despite his ill-usage of her, she is prepared to try and improve his humour:

O, yonder he comes. Now in spite of ills
I’ll speak to him, and I will hear him speak
And do my best to drive it from his heart.
(2.22-24)

His entrance follows, presumably from a game of dice and with the news of a loss of a ‘Five hundred angels vanish from my sight’ (2.26). Despite the financial problems of the Husband, the Wife seems to want to find another explanation for his behaviour and she wonders if he is possessed:

Bad turned to worse; both beggary of the soul
As of the body. And so much unlike
Himself at first, as if some vexed spirit
Had got his form upon him.
(2.36-39)

This is a question that she asks herself repeatedly in the play. Despite his curses, the Wife says that she has never ‘Spoke less than words of duty and of love’ (2.41). Husband recognises that his actions have led to his lands being mortgaged, that his children will have to work to support themselves

Now must
My eldest son be a knave or nothing. He cannot live
Upo’th’soil, for he will have no land to maintain him. That
mortgage sits like a snaffle upon mine inheritance and
makes me chaw upon iron. My second son must be a
promoter and my third a thief, or an underputter, a slave

pander. O, beggary, beggary.

(2.44-50)

They will not inherit wealth as he did. Throughout the scene, the Wife despite being 'the least cause of your discontent' (2.58) tells him that 'Yet what is mine, either in rings or jewels/ Use to your own desire' (2.59-60) and reminds him of the duty he owes to their 'three lovely boys' (2.63) whom the Husband considers bastards (2.65). Possibly she hopes that pointing out his blessings in this life may lead to either repentance or a reversal of his way of life. It may be that their marriage was enforced or some pressure was brought to bear on Husband as it seems that his reasons for marriage were:

Ha' done, thou harlot,
Whom, though for fashion sake I married,
I never could abide!

(2.73-75)

Wife is the niece of 'your worship's late guardian' (2.119) and perhaps his riotous living is his protest at this enforced marriage. The Husband's response to her supportive comments is to divorce her from bed and board until such time as she will agree to sell her dowry lands to 'give new life / Unto those pleasures which I most affect' (2.88-89).

For the affection that she bears him, the Wife visits her uncle at her husband's bidding to ask for money. She explains to her servant that word of the family's financial difficulties has spread and her uncle will be aware of their circumstances. Just as the uncle of the real Walter Calverley did, the uncle in the play is 'ready to prefer him to some office / And place at court' (3.19-20), which is preferable to actually handing over money. The Wife is as ever hopeful that this will restore both her husband's lands and forge a new relationship between them (3.22). Even her servant is

doubtful of this but she is still hopeful of preserving her dowry lands and vows to 'free my husband out of usurers' hands' (3.30). Wife has told her uncle of her husband's 'kindness to me and mild usage' (3.44); to do otherwise might have made him less responsive to her request for help. Unfortunately, despite her best hopes, all that the Husband wants is 'Money, whore, money' (3.69).

As the situation worsens, the Husband, possibly in a fit of madness, murders his eldest son. Catherine Richardson comments that in this play, murder seems inevitable.¹⁶ To his warped way of thinking, killing his son means the son will never have to beg from moneylenders:

My eldest beggar, thou shalt not live to ask an usurer
bread, to cry at a great man's gate, or follow 'good your
honour' by a coach; no, nor your bother.
(4.100-02)

Given that the Husband has squandered his inheritance he has nothing to leave to his own son. His second child is stabbed in his mother's presence with the Husband calling her 'Strumpet' (5.18) and 'harlot' (5.20). Understandably she faints; regaining consciousness only after the Husband has fled. She questions why she has survived when two of her children are dead:

Why do I now recover? Why half live,
To see my children bleed before mine eyes?
A sight able to kill a mother's breast
Without an executioner.
(7.20-23)

After the murder of her children, the Wife is still trying to find a reason for her husband's actions. Again she considers if perhaps some external force might be responsible. She asks:

¹⁶ Catherine Richardson, *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy in Early Modern England*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p.190.

What is it has beguiled him of all grace
And stole away humanity from his breast?
To slay his children, purposed to kill his wife,
And spoil his servants!

(7.32-35)

The removal of both grace and humanity would reduce him to the level of an animal or perhaps a devil. The use of the word beguile suggests that the Wife believes that something or someone has deceived or deluded him.¹⁷ Again, she is trying to find some reason for his behaviour, financial or otherwise. Perhaps an external force makes it easier for her to forgive what he has done rather than recognising that he is weak and a spendthrift who has left his family without the inheritance that he himself had.

In the final scene, the Husband asks to be allowed to speak to the Wife. In trying to explain his reasons he also refers to possession by the devil:

now glides the devil from me,
Departs at every joint, heaves up my nails.
O, catch him new torments that were ne'er invented;
Bind him one thousand more, you blessed angels,
In that pit bottomless. Let him not rise
To make men act unnatural tragedies,

(10.18-23)

The Wife is still magnanimous, saying that her former sorrows cannot compare to this (10.61-62), the picture she presents is that of a 'Patient Griselda', who no matter what she has to endure accepts it with fortitude, his life still means so much to her:¹⁸

Dearer than all is my poor husband's life.
Heaven give my body strength, which yet is faint
With much expense of blood, and I will kneel,
Sue for his life, number up all my friends
To plead for pardon - my dear husband's life!

(10.65-69)

¹⁷ *OED* beguile (v) definition no 1 (a).

¹⁸ Judith Bronfin, 'Griselda Renaissance Woman', in *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print: Counterbalancing the Canon*, (eds.) Anne M. Haselkorn and Betty S. Travitsky (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990) p.211.

The repetition of the words ‘husband’s life’ is an indication of the feelings, not necessarily love, that the Wife still holds for her husband, but for the Husband there is no reprieve.

Whilst the Wife is a victim of tragedy, she is more a victim of circumstance than a party to her own tragedy as are the other women discussed in previous chapters. Her tragedy was in marrying this particular man. At the end of the play apart from herself and her babe in arms who are both still alive, her two older children have been murdered by their father, her husband, who is on his way to his possible execution.

Wardship is an important element in *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* and drives the action of the play. Wardship in early seventeenth-century England was according to Glenn H. Blayney, often abused and now recognised as a social evil.¹⁹ It had implications not just as regards the inheritance of money or property at a certain age but also for marriage and is a useful background against which this play can be considered. A guardian could, if he chose, impose his will on every aspect of his ward’s life and lands. Wardships, particularly those involving wealth, were sold by the Court of Wards and Liveries. This was a very lucrative business and is indicated by the sale of wardships which averaged thirty five a year during the reign of Edward VI and increased to an average of one hundred and twenty-three in the years between 1610 and 1613.²⁰

There were three duties to guardianship: to oversee the education of his ward; to administer the estates of his ward so that they were in a proper state when the ward reached his majority; and to arrange a suitable (and possibly advantageous) marriage for his ward.²¹ These duties implied that in turn a ward would recognise his guardian’s

¹⁹ Glenn H. Blayney, ‘Wardship in English Drama (1600-1650)’, *SP* 53 (1956), p.470.

²⁰ Blayney, ‘Wardship in English Drama’, p.471.

²¹ Margaret Loftus Ranald, “‘As Marriage Binds and Blood Breaks’: English Marriage and Shakespeare’, *SQ* 30 (1979), p.79.

care of him by submitting to his guardian's will and consenting to the marriage arranged for him. David Atkinson suggests that it was the attraction of this system of enforced marriage that kept wardship in existence until the middle of the seventeenth century; *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* is just one criticism of the practice.²² However he also asserts, despite what writing on the subject may suggest, that the actual number of enforced marriages is fewer than believed. For a dramatist, there were attractions to using an enforced marriage as a plot device, particularly, as for example in *The Vow-Breaker*, when it involved the marriage of a young girl to an older man. In *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* and *The Vow-Breaker* it is the second enforced marriage which leads to tragedy.

Wards who married without the consent of their guardian had to pay a fine and could also be fined for refusing to marry their chosen spouse. Ann Jennalie Cook refers to the case of Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, who was fined five thousand pounds when he refused to marry Elizabeth Vere.²³ A worse fate befell one wife of a ward who married without the guardian's permission; Anne Barnes spent almost a year in the Fleet prison for marrying Walter Aston, the ward of the attorney-general Sir Edward Coke.²⁴ In an article published in 1959 Blayney refers to a shift in sentiment and argues that there are an increased number of references to the problem of enforced marriage in literature and as a theme in plays in the early seventeenth century, reflecting the move away from marriages of convenience to marriages for love.²⁵ In *The Family, Sex and Marriage 1500-1800* Lawrence Stone refers to marrying for love as being something that did happen, but given the opposition of parents or guardians,

²² David Atkinson, 'Marriage under Compulsion in English Renaissance Drama', *ES* 67 (1986), p.484.

²³ Ann Jennalie Cook, *Making a Match: Courtship in Shakespeare and His Society* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1991), p.86.

²⁴ T. G. A. Nelson, 'Doing Things with Words:', *SP* 95 (1998), p.363.

²⁵ Glenn H. Blayney, 'Enforcement of Marriage in English Drama (1600-1650)', *PQ* 38 (1959), p.459.

these love affairs did not always result in happy marriages.²⁶ He suggests that love before marriage increased in the early seventeenth century and became fashionable with the rise of the romantic novel. In his review of Lawrence Stone's book, Alan Macfarlane takes issue with this and asks why the romantic novel had this effect when the poetry and drama of previous centuries did not.²⁷ Writing almost twenty years later, David Cressy's view of love and marriage is very different from that of Stone's view of marriages devoid of love, which he describes as reckless. Cressy believes love is fundamental in both courtship and marriage and he refers to diaries and letters which support this view.²⁸ Marriage could be considered in some cases to be a commercial transaction; romance was not a basis for marriage but true affection between husbands and wives did exist.

Sharing the same source as the 1605 pamphlet is *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* which includes both a ward and a pre-contract of marriage - the title of the play is a pointed one.²⁹ William Scarborrow, the young protagonist in *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* is a ward and still in his minority. The plight troth that he enters into with Clare Harcop has serious implications for both of them. As the wealthy ward of Lord Falconbridge, William Scarborrow is an attractive proposition as a son-in-law. Ilford tells him that he has 'a couple of young Gentlewomen to my Daughters, a thousand ayeare will do well divided among them' (92-3).³⁰ William Scarborrow and Clare Harcop, whose father has suggested they marry (226), decide that they are suited to one another and agree to enter in to a contract. This does come with caveats, as Clare tells Scarborrow that she is too young (she is sixteen (780) to his eighteen years at next

²⁶ Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage 1500-1800*, p.189.

²⁷ Alan Macfarlane, Review, 'The Family, Sex and Marriage 1500-1800', *History and Theory* 18 (1979), p.114.

²⁸ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage & Death*, p.261.

²⁹ Atkinson, 'Marriage under Compulsion', *ES* 67 p.483.

³⁰ All quotations are from the edition edited by Glenn H. Blayney for the Malone Society (1964).

Pentecost (326)) and he will 'stray from the steps of Gentility, the fashion among them is to marry first, and love after by leisure' (229-31). Clare asks if he will enforce her (233). She is also aware that he is a ward and is underage and that at a future date he may use this to escape the marriage:

O God, you are too hot in your gifts, should I accept them, we should have you plead nonage, some halfe a year hence: sue for reversement & say the deed was done under age.
(236-238)

However, despite any lingering doubts they give their promise to one another *per verba de praesenti* with Scarborrow speaking first:

Scarborrow. This hand thus takes thee as my loving wife,
Clare. For better, for worse
Scarborrow. I, till death us depart love.
Clare. Why then I thanke you Sir, and now I am like to have
that I long look for: A Husband.
(242-46)

According to Blayney, a contemporary audience would have recognised these words as a binding betrothal ceremony between the couple.³¹ Once they have exchanged vows, Scarborrow young as he may be, has very clear ideas as to what he expects from the wife who is now his:

Clare, you are now mine, and I must let you know,
What every wife doth to her husband owe,
To be a wife, is to be Dedicate
Not to a youthfull course, wild, and unsteddy,
But to the soule of eirtue, obedience,
Studying to please, and never to offend.
Wives, have two eyes created, not like Birds
To rome about at pleasure, but for two sentinels,
To watch their husbands safety as their owne,
Two hands, ones to feed him, the other her selfe:
Two feet, and one of them is their husbands,
They have two of every thing, onely of one,
Their Chastity, that should be his alone,
(249-61)

³¹ Blayney, 'Wardship in English Drama', *SP* 53, p.473.

Clare is equal to this and tells him if wives owe a duty to their husbands, husbands also have their duties:

As women owe a duty, so do men.
Men must be like the branch and barke to trees,
Which doth defend them from tempestuous rage,
Cloth them in Winter, tender them in age,
Or as Ewes love unto their Eanlings lives,
Such should be husbands custome to their wives.
(2689-73)

The writer of the play is setting up Clare for her discovery that the man she has married will do none of these things. She tells him that 'Men never give their faith' (285) and also asks him to think of the vows they have made, offering perhaps the opportunity for him to withdraw his promises 'Unless your hart, then with your wordes agree, / Yet let us part, and lesse us both be free.' (288-89). Equally clear in their views on the duties of husband and wife are Katherine and Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew*, written fourteen years before *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage*; both plays were in the repertoire of Chamberlain's / King's Men.³² Although she is his 'bonny Kate' (3.2.225) Petruchio is clear that:

I will be master of what is mine own,
She is my goods, my chattels, she is my house,
My household stuff, my field, my barn,
My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything.
(3.2.227-30)³³

In the final scene of the play, it is Katherine who advises the other women as to the duty that they owe their husbands:

Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee,

³² Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company 1594-1642*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pps.290 and 293.

³³ William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, (ed.) Brian Morris, Arden Shakespeare, (Routledge: London and New York, 1981).

And for thy maintenance; commits his body
To painful labour both by sea and land,
To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,
Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe;
And craves no other tribute at thy hands
But love, fair looks, and true obedience;
Too little payment for so great a debt.
Such duty as the subject owes the prince
Even such as a woman oweth to her husband.
(5.2.147-57)

Luckily for the couple, Clare's father is happy with the marriage, he is after all gaining a wealthy son-in-law and perhaps chooses to ignore the fact that he is under age and that this is a clandestine marriage. However, almost as soon as Scarborough swears that his promises are true (290-91) he is summoned by his guardian, Lord Falconbridge, to London.

Lord Falconbridge plans a marriage for his ward and has found a bride for him; she is 'of Noble parentage, / A Neece of mine' (359-60), Katherine. Understandably, Scarborough is reluctant both to entertain the marriage and to give the real reason for not wanting this marriage. Instead he uses his being underage and claims 'O pardon me my Lord the unripeness of my yeares' (406), fears which are dismissed by his guardian. Eventually, in words that echo his earlier lines to Clare, he admits

O Good my Lord
Had I two soules, then might I have two wives,
Had I two faiths, then had I one for her,
Having of both but one, that one is given
To Sir John Harcops daughter.
(417-21)

As he has made 'an oath' (423) to Clare, Scarborough points out that marriage is indissoluble and there is only a finite ending 'Death onely cuts that knot tide with the tongue' (427). Scarborough tells his guardian that having made an oath to Clare, a second marriage will make him an adulterer:

My marriage makes me an Adulterer,
In which blacke sheets, I wallow all my life,
My babes being Bastards, and a whore my wife.
(430-32)

Yet, he allows himself to be persuaded to marry Katherine following Lord Falconbridge's threat to lay waste to his land. Technically as T. G. A. Nelson points out in such circumstances, a guardian (or parents) would not be able to force a marriage on a child or ward, as they were, although perhaps in a limited sense, married to someone else.³⁴ However, from a dramatist's perspective, an enforced marriage provides more dramatic opportunities, particularly for tragedy. Perhaps confirming Blayney's argument for the increase in literature and drama of enforced marriage, Scarborough's uncle is very clear about the duty owed by Scarborough to his guardian when it comes to all aspects of his life, including marriage:

Yet being as it is, it must be your care,
To salve it with advice, not with dispaire,
you are his ward, being so, the Law intends,
He is to have your duty, and in his rule
Is both your marriage, and your heritage,
(472-76)

In the absence of any alternative, Scarborough submits to this enforced marriage:

Fate pittie me, because I am inforst,
For I have heard those matches have cost bloud,
Where love is once begun and then withstood.
(493-95)

Clare meanwhile is still living in her father's house. Although the marriage may not be recognised by his guardian, Scarborough's brothers visit Clare and acknowledge the relationship that exists between the couple as Thomas Scarborough tells her:

³⁴ Nelson 'Doing Things with Words', p.359.

I like you well, prethee make hast and bring store of boyes,
but bee sure they have good faces, that they may call me unckle.
(666-68)

She refers to them as ‘my *Scarborrows* brothers’ (673) and to herself as ‘his troth-plight wife’ (674).

Perhaps an indication of Scarborrow’s immaturity is illustrated in how he communicates the news of his marriage to Clare by writing a letter to her, which she receives during the visit from his brothers. Expecting a love letter, she asks to be left alone to read it. That she loves her young husband and believes he shares in these feelings is illustrated in the lines that follow as she looks at the letter in her hand: ‘Shall I opent: no, Ile kiss it first, / Because his outside last did kiss his hand’ (762-63).

She imagines what he might say in the letter and the affectionate terms that he might use to think of her:

Methinkes I gesse how kindly he doth write,
Of his true Love to me, as Chuck, Sweet-hart,
I prethee do not thinke the time too long,
That keeps us from the sweets of marriage rites,
And then he sets my name and kisses it,
Wishing my lips his sheet to write upon,
(767-72)

She imagines him writing to her with speed (777). Given these thoughts, when confronted with the brief message from him she cannot believe what she reads; it is almost as if ‘Mine eyes are not mine owne’ (779). She checks the direction on the letter to ensure it is actually for her ‘To my beloved Clare’ (795) before she reads his few words ‘*Forgive me, I am married: / william Scarborrow*’ (798-99). Immediately, she realises the situation that she is now in as a result of the contract that she and Scarborrow made and his subsequent second marriage:

A wretched maid, not fit for any man,
For being united his with plighted faiths,
Who ever sues to me commits a sinne,
Besiedgeth me, and who shal marry me:
(814-17)

Although she is 'Young, Fayre, Rich, Honest, Virtuous' (820), no one will marry her and his subsequent marriage leaves her living in adultery: 'I am but his whore, live in Adultery.' (822). She recognises that for her father, as she is an only child: 'In me he hath a hope, tho not his name / Can be increast, yet by my Issue' (831-32). This will not happen now unless he forces her to marry; an enforced marriage just as Scarborrow's. When John Scarborrow returns she tells him her news and that she has prepared a reply to his brother. It is as brief as his is to her and begins with the same two words as his '*Forgive me, I am dead*' (851). She repeats her warnings on the 'false promises of men' (853). In a few lines following the entry of her father, she is dead as she tells him:

Your daughter,
That begs of you to see her buried,
Prayes Scarborrow to forgive her: she is dead.
(880-882)

It is implied Clare has taken her own life, her lines suggest this as she speaks of 'an act too foule, / A wife thus did to cleanse her husbands soule' (871-72) and this is what her father appears to think; 'What hand hath made thee pale? Or if thine owne, / What cause hadst thou that wert thy fathers Joy'(890-91). Although this may regularise Scarborrow's second marriage from a legal perspective, as whilst Clare lived, Scarborrow was a bigamist and Katherine an adulteress, Scarborrow's reaction is to set off on a life of profligacy as his brother recounts:

It should be his only aime, to beggar his,
To spend their meanes, and in his onely pride,
Which with a sigh confirmed, hees rid to London,

Vowing a course, that by his life so foule,
Men nere should joyn the hands, without the soule.
(1029-33)

Clare's death would appear to be the catalyst for what subsequently happens to Scarborough, his debts and his treatment of his brothers. It is the dead Clare who he continues to think of as his wife; to him Katherine is a harlot (2479) and their children bastards (2481). Magnanimously, Lord Falconbridge on his deathbed takes upon himself the blame for the enforced marriage, leaving a letter for Scarborough and leaving him 'double of the wealth you had' (2837). The play has a happy ending (for some) not least because as Clare's widower Scarborough can say:

I am new wed so ends old marriage woe,
And in your eyes so lovingly being wed,
We hope your hands will bring us to our bed.
(2866-68)

For Clare, once her title of wife is taken from her, there is no longer a reason to exist and she dies. T. G. A. Nelson suggests, because there is no longer a social space for her to occupy and her position cannot be regularised, she cannot exist and death becomes the only option for her.³⁵ It would be possible to substitute the name of Wife (from *Yorkshire Tragedy*) for Clare in the play, as once that role is taken from her, she has no existence without it and the only possible outcome for her is death.

Enforced marriage as a theme is also explored in *The Vow-Breaker*. Against the wishes of their parents Young Bateman and Ann Boote make a vow to one another before he leaves for war. He is hoping for the glory that will enhance him in the eyes of Ann's father. Described in Prologue or The Illustration as 'This faithlesse woman' she 'Plighted her troth', but later she dismisses these 'foolish lovers vowes' (1.4.41) as something that she did in her childish days and agrees to marry the older and wealthier

³⁵ Nelson, 'Doing Things with Words' p.362.

German.³⁶ Her love, Young Bateman, may be handsome but wealth has both its privileges and its advantages. Ann Boote resembles Alice Arden in making decisions about her own life. She makes a contract with Young Bateman but later gives in to her desire for wealth and marries German. However, she does come to regret this marriage and kills herself after Young Bateman's suicide. In contrast to *A Yorkshire Tragedy* and *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage*, neither Ann nor Young Bateman are wards but both (of them) have fathers with a very clear idea of who their offspring should marry.

At the beginning of the play it is Ann Boote who suggests that if either of them is to be unfaithful it will be Young Bateman as 'Souldiers in Warre make any saint their owne, / Forgetting those they are devoted too!' (1.1.35-36) whilst 'Be it writ in brasse, / My love shall be as durable as that! (1.1.42). Her reference may be to an inscription, such as those used on sepulchral tablets made of brass so that they would last and were imperishable.³⁷ The vows made by Young Bateman and Ann Boote involve an exchange of a token, a piece of gold:

<i>Young Bateman.</i>	Now, <i>Nan</i> , heres none but thou, and I; thy love Emboldens me to speake, and cheerfully. Here is a peece of gold, tis but a little one Yet big enough to ty, and seale a knot, A jugall knot on Earth, to which high heaven Now cryes <i>Amen</i> ; say thou so too, and then When eyther of us breakes this sacred bond Let us be made strange spectacles to the world, To heaven, and earth.
<i>Ann.</i>	Amen, say I.

(1.2.63-71)

The couple have asked Ann's cousin to leave so their contract has no witnesses. As suggested by Laura Gowing the words spoken by the couple do reflect the marriage service. The words spoken by them are a form of *per verba de praesenti* and follow the

³⁶ All quotations are from edition edited by Hans Wallrath, *Materialien Zur Kunde des älteren Englischen Dramas* 42 (Louvain, 1914).

³⁷ *OED*, brass (n) definitions no. 1(c) and no. 2 (a).

Book of Common Prayer rite of solemnisation of marriage. It is Bateman, as the groom who speaks first and gives Ann a piece of gold. According to Loreen L. Giese, the gift itself was not as important as the meaning of the exchange, whether it was a pledge of love or given during a marriage ceremony and reflected the intentions of both the giver and the receiver.³⁸ Young Bateman would seem to give the token as a pledge of his love in a binding contract. Despite her comments on her enduring love, Ann Boote is not as sincere as these suggest; she uses the word 'when' twice rather than 'if' or 'might' to suggest that she will be false to him: 'And let heaven loth me when I falsifie.' (1.2.72) and 'When I prove false of thee; oh, may I then / Beheld the scorne of heaven, earth, and men' (1.2.80-81). Ann does not give Young Bateman a gift of her own. An irregular marriage such as this did give a woman a degree of control that she did not have in the form of the regular solemnisation of marriage where she was given away by her father.³⁹ Ann takes over from her father the responsibility of deciding to whom she will make her promises.

Three scenes later Ann is ready to marry German, an event that surprises her cousin Ursula who cannot understand Ann's reasons given German's shortcomings: 'his head's like a *Welch-mans* Crest on St. *Davies* day' (1.4.5-6). Ann suggests that an older husband is the ideal, taking examples from the natural world, a metaphor repeated by her later in the play:

In nat'rall things we see that Herbes, and Plants
 In autumnne ever doe receive perfection,
 As they, so man, never attaines his height
 Till in the autumnne of his growing age.
 Experience like a Mistris beautifies him
 With silver haire, badges of experience,
 Of wisdom, honours, counsell, knowledge, arts,
 With all th'endowments vertue hath in store.
 Contrarily, greene headed youth,

³⁸ Loreen L. Giese, *Courtships, Marriage Customs, and Shakespeare's Comedies* (London: Palgrave, 2006), p.84.

³⁹ Giese, *Courtships, Marriage Customs* p.121.

Being in the spring or summer of his age,
Is prone to surfets, riots, intemperancies,
And all the stocke of ill that vice is queene of.
(1.4.9-20)

Her next lines suggests the real reason - 'He brings wealth' - (1.4.29) and she admits that her love for Young Bateman was something she did in 'my childish daies' (1.4.39), after all 'Wealth has a priviledge that beauty cannot' (1.4.45). It is this argument that Ann uses when German refers to the rumour that she is 'affianc'd' (1.4.81) to Young Bateman; German does not want 'the curse / Of contract breaking' (1.4.83-84) to fall on his head. For the second time in the scene Ann refers to loving Young Bateman in the past but this ended when she saw the extent of the differences between their respective fathers. She comes to German with love 'as free, as bright, and pure / As are these unstaind Lampes beyond the Moone' (1.4.99-100).

By the beginning of Act 2 Scene 2 Ursula tells the audience that Ann is already regretting her marriage to German:

all this is manifest in my new
Bride, she that yesterday gave faith to one, the next day mar-
ried another; and now married shees sicke of the sullens,
shee wants youth to enflame, and give satietie a fresh
appetite;
(2.2.9-13)

When confronted by Young Bateman, Ann pretends at first that 'I doe not know you— touch me not!' (2.2.73). However, when she does acknowledge him, he reminds her of the vows they made to one another. In the scene where they make their vows there is no mention of the piece of gold being broken in two, but from Young Bateman's next lines it is clear that they did this, perhaps a piece of stage business as they exchange vows. He reminds Ann that theirs was a solemn contract before God, although it is a

clandestine marriage as it is does not include the necessary requirements under canon law:

Our vows were made to Heaven, and on Earth
They must be ratifide, in part they are
By giving of a pledge, a piece of Gold,
Which when we broke, jointly then we swore
Alive or dead for to enjoy each other,
And so we will spight of thy fathers frownes.
(2.2.92-97)

For Ann ‘You talke idely, sir; these sparks of love / That were twixt you, and *I*, are quite extinct.’ (2.2.98-99). With an eye to her own future she does hold out some hope for Young Bateman:

If you will be wise, and live one yeere a batchelour
tis ten to one, thats odds, I bury my husband, e’re *I* weare
out my wedding Ring.
(2.2.103-05)

also:

And may I tell you, if youle stay my husbands
Funerall, I’le promise you, i’le mourne, and marry all in a month.
(2.2.130-32)

This is a sentiment which Young Bateman finds ‘monstrous’ (2.2.133). His reaction, whilst repeating that he is not cursing her, is to tell her that ‘Alive or dead, I must, and will enjoy thee’ (2.2.172). Young Bateman’s father has his own revenge on both the young couple and Ann’s father; he has Boote arrested and looks for one thousand pounds because of the contract that existed between the couple:

This day his father hath arrested me
Upon an action of a thousand poundes
A precontract betwixt his son, and thee.
(2.2.205-07)

In despair at Ann’s actions, Young Bateman hangs himself. Ann’s reaction to this appears cold-hearted and is in evidence when she visits Bateman after his son’s death.

She tells him that he should have ‘disciplind your sonne in’s youth’ (2.4.114). Her advice to him is:

My best counsell is that you bury him as the custome
of the Country is, and drive a stacke through him; so perhaps
I that had no quietnes with him, whilst he liv’d, may
sleepe in peace now he’s dead.

(2.4.123-26)

These harsh words which may be the only way that she can deal with the consequences of her actions and Young Bateman’s death, describe the practices relating to the burial of a body following suicide as discussed previously in relation to Anne Frankford. Ursula warns Ann that Young Bateman’s ghost may haunt her, something which happens almost immediately as Ann rushes in at the beginning of the next scene haunted by a shadow that ‘will not let me rest, sleepe, nor eat (3.1.4). After Ursula’s exit, Ann addresses the audience directly with advice for lovers:

You that are Lovers, by me you may perceive
What is the burden of a troubled mind;
Take heede of vowes, and protestations
Which wantonly in dalliancies you make;
The eie of Heaven is on you, and your oaths
Are registred; which if you brake – bless me!

(3.1.51-565)

Ann may not have made her vows with the seriousness that they deserved and she wants her audience to be aware that these ‘dalliancies’ (3.1.54) do have consequences if these sacred binding vows are broken. The last exclamation is at the arrival of Young Bateman’s ghost who reminds her of his promise to enjoy her alive or dead (3.1.76) and points to the piece of gold that they broke between them (3.1.93). Ann refers to the ghost as ‘thou fiery *Effigies* / Of my wrong’d *Bateman*’ (3.1.81-82) and admits that she was wrong to speak as she did to the grieving Bateman:

I did him wrong to gybe his miseries
When as he bore the dead Corpes in his armes;

My *Genius* tels me, I shall have no rest
Till I have made contrition.
(3.1.121-24)

Ann's remorse leads her to visit Bateman again but her manner has changed and she seems to be looking for consolation or possibly forgiveness. Bateman does forgive her but her agitation leads him to suggest that in her state (pregnancy) this passion may harm her or the child (3.4.122-4). Ann has come to believe that she has not long to live 'I shall not live / To take felicity in it!' (3.4.126-27); she seems to will herself to death. She is unable to take comfort in her baby and just as Clare Harcop did she asks her father 'Leave me your blessing' (4.2.80) and the Gossips and women to keep a close watch on her as:

I pray, be vigilant,
For if you slumber, or shut your eie-lids,
You never shall behold my living corps.
(4.2.86-88)

Ann seems to have been unsettled by a dream that she has had, which has suggested her death. She asks that her words describing this dream are written down so that when the time comes, it will be known that she spoke the truth.

The dream began with Ann walking by a river and, although it was winter when '*Herbes, and Flowers / Natures choisest braveries, are dead*' (4.2.108-09), contrary to Nature flowers are in bloom. She lists the flowers that she gathers; red roses, damask, pansies, pinks, daffodils, daisies, cowslips, harebells, marigolds and violets. Herbs and plants had long been used in both conventional medicine and that of the folk / cunning folk tradition. There was a language of flowers with each flower having a particular meaning for example courtship and love. John Gerarde was a herbalist who attended Lord Burleigh's herb garden at Theobalds for over twenty years and in 1608 he was elected Master of the Barber-Surgeon's Company. His *Historie of Plants* was printed

in England in 1597.⁴⁰ Gerarde illustrates each of the plants and provides a description of it and of its use in 'Physicke'. Some of the plants described by Ann did have a use in this way. Daisies if added to water and drunk were good against agues. Cowslips were used by one practitioner in London to cure the 'phrensie'; it could also be used to purge the brain. Marigolds were used to cure 'tremblings of the heart' and a concoction of violets and sugar 'comforteth the heart'. Perhaps what the dramatist is suggesting, as these plants also had a use in easing the emotions of the heart, that Ann is experiencing emotional conflict; however it is possible that she is still recovering physically from childbirth.

Having made a garland she then sees a 'lovely person / Whose countenance was full of splendancy' (4.2.120-21). When this wonderful apparition moves onto the water, she follows it and is drowned. Ann again asks the women:

Pray, watch me well this night; for if you sleepe,
I shall goe gather *Flowers*, and then you'l weepe.
(4.2.128-29)

Unfortunately for Ann her watchers fall asleep (perhaps with supernatural intervention) and a Ghost appears to bring her with him as 'The Ferry-man attends thee at the verge' (4.2.187) and despite her call to 'wives, cozens, Mid-wives, / Good Angels' (4.2.209-10) she is led away. The visions that she dreamt become a reality and she drowns herself, her body found later at the river by the women. Given the events that have happened to her, one or all of these could have been a motive for her suicide; however, it is also possible that it is related to her recent childbirth. A suicide in these circumstances might have been recorded as being whilst the person was *non compos mentis*.

⁴⁰ John Gerarde, *The Herball or Generall Historie of Plantes: Gathered by John Gerarde of London Master of Chirurgerie* (London: John Norton, 1597), Lib.2.

In an article by Lori E. Ross it is remarked that the intra and postpartum periods are recognised as times where a woman may be more vulnerable to psychotic disorders and the cause of these is unclear.⁴¹ The authors also discuss the association between chronic sleep loss and negative mood which can develop into an episode of depression. They comment that even historical accounts of puerperal insanity recorded that the almost universal symptom was loss of sleep. Ann Boote has told her cousin that there is something which ‘haunts me as my shaddow or a vision! / It will not let me rest, sleepe, nor eat’ (3.1.3-4). Although what is now described as postpartum psychosis is rare, physicians in Early Modern Europe did recognise that women could encounter problems at this time. *The Birth of Mankind* appeared in an English translation in 1540 and, in a chapter on the many things which can happen to women after their labour, it refers to ‘the fever, the ague, or swelling or inflation of the body, other tumbling in the belly, or else commotion’.⁴² According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* a definition of ‘commotion’ in use at the date of the play was ‘mental perturbation’ and Ann Boote has undergone such events in the play to cause mental anguish.⁴³ The two fathers are left with their grief and Bateman, in lines similar to the closing lines of *Romeo and Juliet*, suggests that they become friends and ‘write the tragedy / Of our poore children’ (4.2.301-02).

Previous chapters of the thesis have considered how some of the victims of tragedy in these domestic dramas may play a role in their own tragedy and this can also be applied to these three women. The Wife uses all the financial help within her power to try and keep her dower lands intact as the Husband rapidly spends his inheritance through riotous living. She visits her uncle, the Husband’s former guardian, seeking

⁴¹ Lori E. Ross, Brian J. Murray and Meir Steiner, ‘Sleep and Perinatal Mood Disorders: A Critical Review’, *Journal of Psychiatry & Neurosciences* 30 (2005), pps. 247-53.

⁴² Thomas Raynalde, *The Birth of Mankind*, (ed.) Elaine Hobby, (London: Ashgate, 2000), p.124.

⁴³ *OED*, commotion (n) definition 5.

financial help or preferment at court to try and resolve the situation. The young descendant of a noble family has not only spent his inheritance but has deteriorated physically as a result of his riotous living. The Wife is constantly supportive and stoic in her role as wife and mother, despite enduring the murder of her children and the execution of her husband. The last words of the play spoken by the Master are in support of her. There will be a loss of identity for her if her husband is executed when she will no longer be a wife but a widow.

Clare Harcop is similar to the Wife in that her misfortune comes from one action on her part, the plight troth she enters into with a young and wealthy ward. Once they exchange promises she believes in a romantic future together. However they both underestimate the power which can be brought to bear on a young ward by his guardian when it comes to marriage, particularly one who is both wealthy and a minor. The audience knows what is in the letter that Scarborough writes to Clare as she stands with the unread letter in her hand. She perhaps unconsciously postpones the moment of actually reading the letter as she thinks of him writing to her and the affectionate words he would use when thinking of her. When she learns that he has married, without either a social space for her to occupy or no regularised position, she dies. She has no existence other than that of wife, the loss of that identity takes away her very reason for existence. Clare and the Wife are perhaps less culpable in being a guilty party to their own tragedies than some of the other women discussed in this thesis. Their tragedy lies in marrying two particular men, Husband and William Scarborough.

Ann Boote exchanges vows with young Bateman as he leaves for war; perhaps there is an element of her doing this purely because he is going to war. Should he be killed, she will be released from her promises. Ann Boote is similar in many ways to Alice Arden and makes her own choices in life; she is responsible both for her own

tragedy and for the suicide of Young Bateman. Young Bateman is an attractive proposition for a time but, just like Alice Arden, greed plays a part in Ann's plans. She is happy to contemplate a second husband shortly after marriage to her first and suggests to Young Bateman that if he can wait a year she will be a widow. Unlike Alice, murdering German is not something that she considers; instead it is his age and short life expectancy that she believes will see her become a widow within a year. Whilst Young Scarborough when confronted by his guardian is reluctant to enter into the marriage that has been arranged for him, Ann Boote sees the advantages of wealth and position and is more amenable to breaking her vows. When she recognises that her second marriage and harsh words to Young Bateman may have been a factor in his suicide she does regret her actions. Overcome with remorse and suffering possibly from either puerperal depression or mania she commits suicide.

Jacobean theatre and domestic drama provided its audience with an insight into the lives of themselves and their neighbours, unlike other earlier tragedies where kings or princes were the subjects. The petty treasons and jealousies of their lives, their marriages and relationships with their neighbours whether in Faversham, Edmonton or Clifton were to be seen at the theatre. Dramatists could take liberties whether for comedy or tragedy and marriage could provide the theme for any number of plays, from broken vows to adultery and murder. Plays did not have to reflect the actual lives and marriages of its audience. Even plays whose source was a historical event, such as the murder of Thomas Arden in 1551 by his wife and her lover, could take some liberties in the telling of the story to increase their dramatic potential and show their actions from a particular view-point. The social evils of wardship and enforced marriage could be explored on stage with the added complication of a clandestine marriage.

Conclusion

The chapters in this thesis have discussed how each of these women may, in her own way, be a guilty party to her own tragedy to varying degrees. As these women are in many ways very unlike most of their contemporaries in the world outside the theatre, it is perhaps opportune in this Conclusion to consider the contemporary view of women, specifically in relation to marriage and the duties expected of a wife in Early Modern England. Within the family, power was vested in the head of the house; the state placed great emphasis and encouragement on patriarchy.¹ The loyalty and obedience given to the head of the household reflected the loyalty and obedience due to the monarch. The Protestant church supported the absolute subordination of wives, with many sermons on the virtues of a good wife who must above all, be virtuous.

Having considered the women in the plays in the context of the social history of Early Modern England, another way is through some of the literature of this period. Marriage conduct books of the period provide a starting point from which to consider the contemporary view of the ideal wife and to compare this to the women discussed in the previous chapters. It is, however, not possible to fit all of the women neatly into the contemporary view. Two Puritan clergymen Robert Dod and John Cleaver in *A godly form of household government* said that a woman should not gossip and following the teaching of St. Paul, she should be a good housewife.² The authors list three specific duties: a wife must reverence her husband, submit herself to him and she should not 'wear gorgeous apparel, beyond her degree'.³ If she leaves her house it is to attend religious meetings, to visit those in need or to purchase what is needed to provision her

¹ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Penguin, 1982), p.110.

² Kate Aughterson, (ed.) *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook: Constructions of Femininity in England* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.79-81.

³ Aughterson, *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook*, p.79.

household. She should not go out too much in case she should be thought a gossip and be at her most virtuous when in the midst of her domestic affairs.

Gervase Markham's *The English Housewife* from 1615 discusses not just the inner and outer virtues of the housewife but the many skills that she must know from physic and cooking to brewing and baking.⁴ The husband is father and master of the household whose business is for the most beyond the house. The housewife is mother and mistress of the family and her business is within the house. She must be upright and sincere in her religion, modest and temperate in her manner and to her husband always pleasing, amiable and delightful. Her apparel and diet should reflect her husband's estate. Her clothes must be comely and clean and without either garnishes or light in colour and as far as possible from new and fantastic fashions. Of these general virtues the last is worth quoting in full:

To conclude, our English housewife must be of chaste thought, stout courage, patient, untired, watchful, diligent, witty, pleasant, constant in friendship, full of good neighbourhood, wise in discourse, but not frequent therein, sharp and quick of speech, but not bitter or talkative, secret in her affairs, comfortable in her counsels, and generally skilful in all the worthy knowledges which do belong to her vocation; of all or most parts whereof I now in the ensuing discourse intend to speak more largely.

Marriage guides were not limited to prose and the advice given by Samuel Rowlands and Patrick Hannay is in verse. Samuel Rowlands's *The Bride* describes eight duties of a wife.⁵ The first is the importance of her domestic duties indoors; it is her husband who will go abroad on business. It warns of the danger of being a busy-body and meddling in matters which do not concern her. Her thoughts should turn to her kitchen and not the world outside her home; she should educate her children and maids. Alice

⁴ Gervase Markham, *The English Housewife* ed. Michael K. Best (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986).

⁵ Samuel Rowlands, *The Bride*, (Boston: Merryman Press, 1905).

Arden in *Arden of Faversham*, with her assignations at the Flower-de-Luce, is not sitting indoors concentrating on domestic matters, although many of the conversations which she has with her husband refer to the preparation of his meals. Alice is equally unlikely to have been educating her maids. The second duty requires that the wife entertains the friends of her husband, but she can entertain her own acquaintances only with his permission. When asked by her husband to entertain his friend, Wendoll, Anne Frankford in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, says that allowing for modesty, it is her duty to receive his friend. In the same duty it refers to a woman's honesty and says that she needs to shun scandal and avoid any accusations of wantonness.

The third duty requires that she live within her means - a frugal housekeeper - she should not overspend by appearing showily dressed. A specific reference is made to idle housewives in London. Anne Sanders in *A Warning for Fair Women* likes her trinkets, her scarves and rings and the Italian purse and gloves she wants to purchase from the milliner and draper. This interest in accessories might perhaps suggest to a contemporary audience that she is not an entirely serious character as her mind is not always on her domestic chores.

The fourth duty concerns the wife's own house. It is this that she should love best and by staying in she will avoid gadding about and gossiping; a modest woman's home is her delight. Anne Sanders leaves herself open to danger, possibly recognised as such by a contemporary audience, as she sits at her door waiting for her husband's return from the Exchange and is engaged in conversation by the adventurer George Browne. Sitting between two worlds, that of the domestic and the world outside, could have suggested to a contemporary theatre audience that should she venture beyond this to the street there are dangers; her false friend Anne Drury and the adventurer George Browne. The dutiful wife will not go to public plays or taverns risking censure from

wise men; she is a house wife and not a street wife. This duty does emphasise the social isolation of Rachel Merry in *Two Lamentable Tragedies* as she works in and lives over her brother's tavern. In the absence of female visitors to the tavern, she is unlikely to encounter potential friends.

The fifth duty of a wife is obedience to her husband; she does not take on any power from him and his area of business. Alice Arden is her husband's equal in business with her business like arrangements for his murder. The sixth duty is that a wife should calm her husband's anger; any hasty words may fuel his anger. Publicly, Alice Arden at times seems the perfect wife. On a number of occasions she has to placate her husband to divert his suspicions. On one occasion when he has been provoked into taking arms against Mosby, she berates him for not realising that she and Mosby were intending sport.

The seventh duty stresses the importance of her husband's disposition to which she must meekly submit; she must bear his vices with patience and never abuse an absent husband. It is she who is the peacemaker. The eighth and last duty is the love and regard of her husband's honour. This love must be regardless of whether he is poor, sick or distressed; her faithfulness must remain firm, in adversity she must be constant. The Wife in *A Yorkshire Tragedy* epitomises many of the duties: her steadfast loyalty to her husband, placating him and supporting him in adversity. She magnanimously forgives and pleads on his behalf although her husband has murdered two of their children. Alice Arden is the opposite; in getting what she wants, to get the help of Greene she portrays herself as the victim of domestic abuse.

Hannay provides advice not just on how to choose a spouse but how a wife should behave after marriage, for having got a husband it is important to keep him.⁶ The wife must first be obedient: if women rule no-one will obey. He warns against anger: a mild voice will soothe her husband and win him over. A wife should lovingly agree with her husband, and should his fortune decline she must in no way be discontented. Poetically Hannay describes how husband and wife are bound together by chains of love; two souls that cannot be separated. A woman's place is in the domestic sphere: the world of business is too great a load for the weaker sex; her cares at home, his at large. He advises the wife not to consort with other wives who gossip, spend money and plot how they may deceive their husbands; these women are to be shunned. The husband is the one person closest to the wife and a wife should share her thoughts with him so that he can help if needed. By doing this, a wife will show her husband that she prefers him to everyone else and he will love her best. Hannay ends by saying that after death their souls shall reign in heaven.

If anything these guides and the comparison with some of the women discussed in the thesis serve to illustrate the total isolation of Elizabeth Sawyer in the village of Edmonton. She is outside the family nucleus and the authors of the play make this isolation more acute by not referring to her having at some time a husband as did the real Elizabeth Sawyer. A woman so excluded and with physical deformities would have been an easy target for the malice of the villagers and someone on whom to lay the blame for any misfortune large or small.

Anne Drury and Anne Boote would not come to mind as being ideal wives and are perhaps not as easy to fit neatly into the duties described in the conduct books. Anne Drury is a widow with her own household who may or may not have a relationship with

⁶ Patrick Hannay, *A Happy Husband: or Directions for A Maid to Chuse Her Mate. Together with A Wives Behaviovr after Marriage* (St Austens Gate: John Haviland, 1622)

her servant Roger that goes beyond that of servant and mistress. What she does have in common with Anne Boote is a need and desire for money and wealth. Whilst initially appearing to be altruistic in her dealings with George Browne she soon accepts money and encourages Roger to look for some recompense for his services. Anne Boote sees the financial advantages in marriage to an older, wealthy man and is prepared to dismiss the vows that she made to Young Bateman.

The women in these plays illustrate both the virtues and vices described in conduct books and other tracts as they experience and express what it is to be human: to love and need to be loved, to be greedy, callous, resourceful and resolute. Although they may not conform to the picture of the ideal wife, this is not to suggest that the women in these plays are in any way weak characters. It is perhaps easy to dismiss a young girl like Clare Harcop as naïve but she is very clear in what she expects from a husband. She is devastated when she receives the letter from Scarbarrow telling her of his marriage to another, she literally cannot exist without having the role of a wife. These women all have an inner strength seen in their actions, from the indomitable Alice Arden to Rachel Merry and the impassioned speech she makes in defence of brothers on the gallows. They do not always conform to the image of the ideal woman; their lives end in tragedy. Seven of these women are dead or face death at the end of the plays. The woman who lives, the Wife, is facing a living death, two of her children murdered by her husband as he is led away to trial and death. Each of the eight woman is in her own way a strong and remarkable person.

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